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Author(s): Taolo Boipuso Lucas

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Basarwa: Genuine Targets of Empowerment or Pawns in a Political Power Game?

Taolo Boipuso Lucas[§]

Abstract

Different stakeholders work with Basarwa. Ideally these different stakeholders in the empowerment of the Basarwa should work together in a mutually symbiotic relationship where each may benefit from one another to meaningfully address the situation of the Basarwa. However, in practice the stakeholders have formed what is referred to in this paper as power blocs that compete with one another for self aggrandizement. The power blocs include government (Politico-Business power bloc), donor agencies, bureaucracies, the judiciary, intellectuals (members of academia), the citizenry and the Basarwa themselves. Instead of empowering the Basarwa, these power blocs are involved in a relentless conflict to achieve greater power for themselves. Manipulation, intrigue, bickering, posturing, tokenism and mere symbolism often characterize the relationship of the various stakeholders. The ultimate result has been failure to empower the Basarwa.

Introduction

The Basarwa (variously referred to as Bushmen, Khoesan, San, Khoe or Kwe) remain poor and powerless in Botswana. Available literature captures the lives of the Basarwa either as a distinct ethnic group or as inhabitants of remote areas where they form a majority and are characterized by acute economic insecurity, landlessness, deprivation, exploitation, violation of human rights, hopelessness, high dependency levels and excessive alcohol intake (Good, 1993, NORAD, 1996; Nthomang, 1999; Lucas, 2000; Nyathi, 2007).

As early as the late nineteenth century, attempts were made to address the situation of the Basarwa. Such efforts were intensified after independence when a variety of stakeholders including donor agencies offered to assist to improve the life situation of this marginalized section of the Botswana society. Over the years, however, the desire to help them has created power blocs that in many ways defeat the objectives and the process of Basarwa empowerment. Such power blocs have meant that the pursuit of power and its consolidation has often times taken precedence over the empowerment objectives.

Interaction between the Basarwa and the groups mentioned above as stakeholders is often times devoid of a collective marshalling of efforts to exert maximum impact on the negative conditions afflicting Basarwa. Stakeholders prefer instead to pursue individualized and sometimes contradictory intervention options that have proved futile. Conflict and open confrontation between the power blocs such as the famous one between the Botswana government and Survival International is thus a common feature of the Basarwa empowerment bandwagon. Power games and posturing is thus the norm rather than the exception in interventions intended to empower the Basarwa. The net outcome of this situation is persistent poverty, deprivation, exploitation and exclusion of the Basarwa as a distinct population group. It is for this reason that a mutually beneficial relationship between different stakeholders in Basarwa empowerment should be developed and fostered if significant progress is to be achieved in efforts to improve Basarwa livelihoods.

The Nature of the Power Blocs

This section of the paper will isolate and name significant power bloc in Basarwa empowerment. The political elites in Botswana have a great influence on the issue of the Basarwa. This group has a long history of association with the big cattle barons and it is often argued that for many years after independence the political elites have tended to formulate policies with a strong bias towards the cattle industry (Holm and Molutsi, 1988). However, it ought to be noted that many of the political elites and their counterparts

[§] Taolo Boipuso Lucas, Department of Social Work, University of Botswana.

in the cattle industry have since found an additional passion in business. Together with a growing number of foreign nationals who continue to establish business of various kinds, the Botswana political and business elites have formed a strong alliance that influences national policy priorities (Molutsi, 1989). This alliance shall be called the Politico-Business power bloc. It is critical as it wield immense power in relation to the operations of government, particularly in respect to formulation and implementation of policies.

Closely related to the politico-business power bloc is the government bureaucracy. The bureaucracy is a powerful interest in Basarwa empowerment politics. The bureaucracy in Botswana has a well documented reputation of dominating both the formulation and implementation of policies. As a result the bureaucracy has often times frustrated both the formulation and implementation of policies (Hope & Somolekae, 1998). In some situations the internal politics of the bureaucracy as in local-central government relations have made it very difficult to formulate and implement policies. In Basarwa empowerment politics, the role of bureaucracy features prominently. The bureaucracy has made both formulation and implementation of the Remote Area Development Program (RADP) a nightmarish activity (Lucas, 2006). For this reason there shall be a bureaucratic power bloc. This power bloc has very close ties with the politico-business power bloc. They play a complimentary role in policy formulation and implementation.

The international Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) community is yet another stakeholder in Basarwa empowerment equation. Armed with financial resources and the zeal to provide humanitarian aid as well as to protect human rights, the NGO community has often attempted to set the agenda for Basarwa empowerment. The international NGO community in particular with its extensive network and influence across the world has often worked with local NGOs to present a challenge to government efforts. This has not always been well received by government and the bureaucratic elites. This cooperation between local and international NGOs shall be called the NGO/Donor power bloc. In respect of Basarwa empowerment such organizations as NORAD and Survival International will constitute this bloc. This bloc has a long association with the Basarwa and its skirmishes with government are well documented.

The other significant stakeholder in Basarwa empowerment is the intellectual community. The community yearns for recognition and intellectual aggrandizement. The community has awarded itself the task of interpreting the situation of Basarwa and often times it enters into partnership with the NGO community to secure resources for research. Through research, conferences and workshops, the intellectual community produces a lot of information and knowledge about the situation of the Basarwa and yet such knowledge is only rarely disseminated for use by policy makers. This bloc represents a powerful force in Basarwa empowerment politics because its views often receive some measure of respectability amongst the general population. The community shall be named the intellectual/ academic power bloc.

The judiciary with its presumed impartiality normally becomes yet another player in Basarwa empowerment. It supposedly dispenses justice without fear or favour. The judiciary has in recent times featured prominently in Basarwa empowerment equation and in the process it demonstrated that it is a very critical power bloc capable of either empowering or disempowering the Basarwa. The recent case involving Basarwa of CKGR and government of Botswana has demonstrated that the courts are critical power holders in respect to the situation of the Basarwa hence their inclusion in this paper as a critical power bloc

The citizenry is a core player in Basarwa issues. The opinions and views of the people shape policy. Public discourse, pressure from the citizens and solidarity actions from a broad section of society are but some of the actions that show society's outrage towards ill-treatment of some sections of the same society. The reaction of Botswana towards the plight of Basarwa has been characterized by indifference and disinterest. The major ethnic groupings seem to have a consensus with ethnic minorities that Basarwa are at the bottom of the pile when it comes to the hierarchy of ethnic groups. As a consequence thereof, empowerment of the Basarwa is not prioritized both in public and political discourse (Lucas, 2006; Nyathi, 2006). The citizenry in this paper is viewed as a power bloc that has not been sufficiently mobilized to emancipate Basarwa.

Lastly, it has become apparent that Basarwa have become a powerful power bloc in their own right. They have used a variety of avenues to win the support of critical and influential groups at both national and international levels. Locally, Basarwa NGO notably the First People of the Kalahari (FPK) has vocalized the marginalization of this population group. FPK has also worked with local and international organizations to bring the plight of Basarwa to the attention of the world. As noted elsewhere in this paper, Basarwa of CKGR took the government of Botswana to court with the assistance and support of internal and external organizations. Through such support Basarwa have entrenched themselves as a powerful power bloc with massive bargaining power. The fact that Basarwa issues feature prominently on the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination is further testimony that Basarwa's profile as a power bloc has assumed international dimensions.

Power Blocs: Analysis of Relationships

The politico-business power bloc as earlier indicated includes top politicians and their business associates. It has tended to arrogate itself the official mandate to set the agenda and define priorities for Basarwa empowerment. It however lacks the ideology, motivation and keenness to develop clear and robust policies for this target group. Though it makes some vague references to social justice, human rights and empowerment, it is more concerned with priorities that would consolidate itself as a powerful political and economic force in this country. It is for this reason that a disproportionate effort and energy in Botswana is devoted to achieving a private sector led economic dispensation with inadequate attention paid to redistributive justice.

The vigorous campaign for global competitiveness, privatization and citizen economic empowerment benefit the few political and economic elites to the exclusion of the marginalized sections of society. In reality the policies for improving the depressing conditions of the marginalized have not been formulated or implemented with the vigor and verve that accompanies the formulation or implementation of economic related policies. The introduction of Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA), the introduction of venture capital, the formulation of privatization policy and a variety of other economic initiatives that largely benefit this power bloc have been pursued with energy and zeal. The politico-business bloc is also the greatest beneficiary of such schemes as Tribal Grazing Land Policy where huge chunks of land have fallen into private hands. As for policies for Basarwa empowerment, there has been stagnation, delays and inaction. To date there is no explicit and comprehensive policy for the development and empowerment of Basarwa. Adams (1994) has stated that only a de-facto policy found in Cabinet directives, National Development Plans and stated objectives of the program emanating from workshops exist. NORAD (1996:49) goes on to reveal that:

These policy statements have been permissive rather than prescriptive in their approach to the social status, human rights and access to resources of Basarwa and other RADS [Remote Area Dwellers]. They say that measures will be taken, but they do not alter the broader policy, program or institutional framework with which such measures must be implemented. They offer a general rather than a specific commitment to action on the social front. No special action is offered with regard to legislation or practice in such fields as land, education, justice or nature conservation. Furthermore, the institutional and human resources available to the RADP for implementation of the broad range of general commitments have not been expanded.

The absence of an explicit and comprehensive policy on the RADS, or specifically on the Basarwa as a historically disadvantaged population group, has meant that programs for this group of people have existed over the years without proper focus, guidance and direction. This has obviously compromised the internal consistency of the program and undermined its legitimacy among the various stakeholders. Despite this obvious need for a policy, the politico-business bloc has not acted to formulate one as they do not consider

this issue as deserving any prioritization. International conventions and local conference resolutions affirms the existence of indigenous peoples. In Botswana, Basarwa are such people. Their right to self-determination, cultural development and access to traditional lands is critical. As Taylor (2003:2) puts it 'for many San in Botswana control over land is absolutely critical to negotiation of livelihood options for the future, whether they include hunting, and gathering, livestock raising or tourism enterprises'.

Despite this reality, the political elites and popular sentiment still does not recognize Basarwa land and cultural rights. Instead of allowing Basarwa access to land in accordance with International conventions and local conference resolutions, huge chunks of land have been usurped from Basarwa by such programmes as Tribal Grazing Land Policy, Fencing Component of the 1991 National Agricultural Development Policy as well as Wildlife Management Areas (Nthomang, 2003). These programmes for all intents and purposes serve the interest of powerful political elites, senior policy makers and a handful of privileged people. In this scheme of things, Basarwa empowerment is subordinated to the narrow sectarian interest of the powerful politico-business elite. The situation is further compounded by a weak civil society movement, an indifferent citizenry and an ineffective political opposition that do not place a high premium on Basarwa empowerment (Lucas, 2007).

The Bureaucratic Power Bloc

The bureaucracy is normally associated with policy implementation but in Botswana the bureaucracy has a long history of influencing policy formulation and implementation. The national planning process that entails the development of national plans is mainly dominated by the civil service. Due to their high literacy rates and specialized knowledge, the civil servants normally take the lead in the development, implementation and evaluation of different policies of national life (Hope & Somolekae, 1998). Like the politico-business power bloc, the bureaucratic elite have not shown enthusiasm for developing and implementing policies for the Basarwa. As many scholars have indicated, the bureaucracy has often times shown negative attitudes towards the Basarwa. Such attitudes invariably impact negatively on policy and programme outcome for the Basarwa.

Many bureaucrats view Basarwa as unambitious, irresponsible and unmotivated to improve their lot. Other bureaucrats view Basarwa as having developed a culture of dependency and entitlement which they disapprove of. These mindsets inform the formulation and implementation of Basarwa empowerment schemes. It is now close to thirty years since the RADP was conceived but there is no comprehensive policy on this target group. If the Bureaucratic elite prioritized the formulation of such a policy, one can safely argue, that it could have received favourable attention given the influence that the bureaucratic elite have in policy formulation. A problematic situation among the bureaucratic elite is its tendency to collaborate with the politico-business elites at times to the detriment of significant sections of the population.

The bureaucratic power bloc has a destructive influence in the implementation phase of Basarwa empowerment programmes. Given the vagueness of programme designs of the RADP, the ambiguity of objectives, the unclear target population and the inadequacy of programme assumptions, the bureaucratic power bloc use their discretionary powers to implement only the non-contentious basic needs programmes to the conspicuous exclusion of the more radical and libertarian objectives of the programme such as the political/legal, land, human rights aspects. A good example is the issue of land rights. Adams (1994:7) sums it well when he observes that:

When the Basarwa talked about land rights at the participatory meetings of the second San Regional Conference last October, they were clearly referring to exclusive rights to traditional hunting and gathering territories. On the other hand officials understand land rights as customary land grants for house plots and fields.

In doing so bureaucratic power elites are able to do the minimum expected out of them. Additionally, they are able to avoid confrontation with politico-business power bloc who owns large farms (TGLP) around Basarwa settlements. Yet another example is that which concerns the pursuit of political objectives. The RADP staff is comfortable with encouraging participation in decision-making at the level of Village Development Committees (VDC) and Parents Teachers Association (PTA) but they do anything or do very little to encourage Basarwa to contest parliamentary, council and land board elections. In this way, the bureaucratic power elites are able to maintain their stranglehold on a politically disempowered Basarwa.

Politico-Business v. NGO/Donor Power Blocs

NGOs either complement government in the development agenda or play a watchdog or advocacy role in relation to a wide range of issues. Basarwa empowerment is one of the issues which have demonstrated sharp differences between the politico-business bloc and their NGO/Donor counterparts. The Politico-business alliance has tended to resist NGO/donor agencies efforts to set the agenda on the issue of Basarwa empowerment. The Botswana Centre for Human Rights (Ditshwanelo) has had uneasy relations with government in relation to the treatment of Basarwa in the settlements (Mogwe, 1992).

Donor agencies especially NORAD have had notable disagreements in relation to the issue of the Basarwa. Whereas the government of Botswana preferred an ethnically neutral reference and treatment of the Basarwa, NORAD felt that there is need to specifically deal with Basarwa as a distinct population group requiring special interventions, policies and programs. Government strongly resisted this view claiming that it has connotations of 'apartheid' or separate development (Adams, 1994; NORAD, 1996). The other issue that was and still remains a source of serious contestation is that of the land rights of Basarwa. NORAD and other NGO's including Survival International have persistently indicated that the Botswana government is not serious about securing land rights for the Basarwa. Government and NORAD, for instance, have traded accusations and counter accusation over the granting of three farms in Ghanzi initially allocated to Basarwa to a cattle syndicate. Though the decision was finally reversed in favour of the RADs, NORAD had its own misgivings and tensions escalated leading to a future reduction of funding of RADs programs by NORAD (NORAD, 1996).

The differences that existed between NORAD as a donor agency and the government of Botswana led to a number of disturbing outcomes. The differences over policy formulation and its target group led to the withdrawal of business advisors from Norway who were doing a sterling job in the implementation of the Economic Promotion Fund among the RADs. The business advisors were replaced with assistant project officers who had no training at all. The result was a total collapse of EPF projects. The other outcome was the reduction of funding by NORAD in 1991 and its subsequent withdrawal in 1994. Government did not have a plan to sustain NORAD funded projects hence a debilitating collapse of RADs projects to the detriment of the welfare of the Basarwa who constitute a majority of remote area dwellers. In Kweneng District for instance the withdrawal of funding by NORAD led to the total collapse of RADs projects in Serilatholo, Kweneng, Tshwaane and Kaudwane settlements (Lucas, 2000).

The London based Survival International is yet another NGO that has running battles with the government over Basarwa issue. Survival International, an NGO which has an international reputation of working to protect the welfare of indigenous people is working with local NGOs, in particular the First People of the Kalahari to restore the CKGR as an indigenous land for Basarwa. On the other hand government sees CKGR as a national park which prohibits permanent residency by human populations. It is on the basis of that understanding that government relocated the Basarwa of CKGR to New Xade. Survival International together with 189 Basarwa have since mounted a successful legal challenge against the relocation of the Basarwa to New Xade. The High Court has ruled that Basarwa have a right to remain and stay at CKGR as it is their ancestral land. Government has not appealed the decision but Survival International is currently involved in acrimonious debates with the Botswana government over the implementation of the court judgment.

Survival International argues that government has a moral not legal obligation to provide services such as water, health and education for Basarwa returning to the CKGR (Corry, 2008). Failure to provide services according to Survival International amounts to neglect and denial of basic human rights to a group of people who have suffered exploitation, oppression and marginalization for many generations. Government on the other hand argues that it will not provide services inside a Game Reserve as per government policy and consistent with the High Court ruling on the same case (Maribe, 2008). This leaves Basarwa stranded with the possibilities of persistent underdevelopment looming large. In this contest between government and Survival International, dialogue does not seem to be an immediate priority so is the possibility of compromise. The virulent exchanges in the media between Clifford Maribe representing government and Stephen Corry representing Survival International are testimony to this raging contest of the two powerful institutions with each seeking to win public support and sympathy.

The conflict between government of Botswana and NORAD and those between government and Survival International are a clear manifestation of the power contests of the stakeholders. In the contest there is very little regard for the negative outcomes that accrue to Basarwa. NORAD withdrew its support for RADP without due regard to what it meant for Basarwa and once such support is withdrawn government of Botswana, which cannot under any circumstance plead lack of financial resources, decided to let the programme collapse. A lot of resources which could otherwise be used for Basarwa empowerment are wasted in power contests.

The Judiciary as a Power Bloc

The landmark case involving the government of Botswana and the Basarwa of CKGR has revealed the judiciary as an active participant in the power skirmishes involving Basarwa and the different power cleavages. The protracted case that attracted international attention and lasted for not less than five years was concluded in 2006 with three judges of the High Court handing over three distinctive verdicts. Whilst Justice Maruping Dibotelo dismissed Basarwa case completely, justice Unity Dow was in agreement with Basarwa. Justice M.P. Phumaphi adopted a middle ground verdict finding fault on both government and Basarwa. The consolidated judgment favored Basarwa but only in so far as their ancestral right to live in the CKGR was affirmed, and they were allowed to return to the CKGR. Government was however, not compelled to provide services inside the reserve. Quite oddly each party was to pay its costs for the case. The judgment, in a lot of ways failed to settle in a meaningful way the disempowerment of Basarwa occasioned by their relocation and social dislocation (*Sesana and Others v Attorney General (2006) 2 BLR 633*).

The judgment, though seemingly fair and impartial on the surface has certain power connotations and dimensions that should not be ignored. The judiciary handed over a verdict that whilst granting Basarwa their right with the one hand, they took away their power on the other hand by declaring that government is not obliged to provide water and other services for those returning to the reserve. By such judgment, the judiciary disempowered Basarwa and empowered government to pursue its policy of forced relocation through deprivation. It could be discerned from here that though the judiciary had the power and authority to have emancipated Basarwa from oppression and dispossession, it left the government with a lot of room to continue the deprivation of Basarwa of their ancestral land. Immediately judgment was handed down, government through the Attorney General issued a response that reiterated its ambivalence to the rights of Basarwa. Among other things, the rather hard line response from government included the following:

- The 189 individuals listed as respondents in the case will be allowed to enter the CKGR with their minor children without their permits.
- The applicants will be required to produced identity documents (National ID/Omang, passports) before they can enter the CKGR;

- No domestic animals currently outside the CKGR may enter the CKGR since this will be contrary to the law which remains in force;...
- Any person other than the applicants and their minor children will require permits to enter the CKGR; (*Mmegi*, 15 December, 2006:page 2).

The Government response which the independent *Mmegi* newspaper described as 'terse and confrontational' clearly shows that the judicial ruling in the case has done very little to change the attitude of government towards Basarwa. Whilst the ruling grants Basarwa rights to the CKGR, government has come up with a plethora of prohibitions and restriction that effectively curtails Basarwa's enjoyment of their rights over the CKGR. This goes to show that the impartial judiciary in Botswana though commended by scholars such as Sebudubudu (2006) as autonomous from the executive by protecting the rights of citizens, it remains vulnerable to the power of the state. What is even more astonishing with government response is that it comes against the backdrop of concerns by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination over the issue of the treatment of Basarwa relocated from the CKGR to New Xade (CERD, 2006). All these actions together with the establishment of a mine in Gope and the putting up of a tourist resort immediately after the CKGR court ruling both inside the CKGR underline, emphasize and reveal the power of the politico-business-power bloc. (On CKGR Lodge, see Motlogelwa, 28 April, 2008).

An Intellectual Power Bloc

These are the researchers, academics and intellectuals whose trade involves mainly the production of knowledge. The knowledge so produced is often times assumed that it shall be utilized by whoever may need it. The intellectual bloc is often armed with theoretical resources that they use to dissect the issues of Basarwa. As Molebatsi (2003:2) succinctly puts it, 'one of the ironies of the San question in contemporary Botswana is the disjunction that seem to exist between the amount of research that has been conducted and the impact that research has had in influencing policy interventions.' The same author further shows how the researchers have shown very little interest in influencing policy through their research. This leads to a situation where researchers conduct their research for self-aggrandizement and careerist motives.

The language of critique employed by the intellectuals characterizes the work of the intellectual power bloc. It is this language that makes this power bloc unpopular with both bureaucratic and politico-business power blocs. These blocs regard the work of the intellectuals as mainly theoretical and largely inapplicable to practical situations. The sophistication and presumed objectivity of the knowledge generated by the intellectual elite has some measure of attraction to the NGO/Donors community and as such a relationship of convenience exists between the NGO/Donor bloc and the intellectual power bloc. This relationship is however limited to endless conferences, workshops and seminars that produce massive information and recommendations that are rarely used to inform the activities of the NGOs.

The intellectual power bloc has an option that they do not normally mobilize and that is to engage in action oriented research, but more often than not they opt for research that would allow them to maintain some distance with the subject of their research. They prefer to publish their works in prestigious journals that are hardly ever accessed by policy practitioners. It is for this reason that Molebatsi (2003) calls for a paradigm shift that will discard the traditional division of labour between the academic and practitioner but instead researchers should assume an activist posture that shall constantly engage other power bloc in San policy development.

Citizenry as a Power Bloc

Most Batswana have negative attitude towards Basarwa. They believe that Basarwa are poor and marginalized because of innate deficiencies, irresponsibility or laziness (Lucas, 2000). Nyathi (2006:185) argues that the 'Basarwa are viewed as different from the mainstream society. This owes its origin from

their hunter-gatherer past which has been made the basis of negative attitudes towards them by mainstream society that has an agro-pastoral life-style'. In the same article Nyathi further notes that dominant groups in society have dominated development discourse. These dominant groups include the 'major' tribes and most of the assimilated minority groups. The pastoral culture and the values of a cash economy with their concomitant view of land use cause those in the mainstream of society to despise Basarwa and consider them primitive (Chebane, 2006). It is this estimation of Basarwa as backward and underdeveloped that lead to what Taylor (2003) calls a civilizing project of relocating the Basarwa from CKGR to New Xade. The sad reality is that even those who consider themselves as minorities view Basarwa with spite, contempt and disrespect. It would seem that for most of the culturally marginalized and excluded, they derive comfort from being better than Basarwa.

The different power blocs as discussed in this paper are almost assured that whatever treatment they mete out to Basarwa, it is unlikely to invite outrage or strong objection from ordinary people. It is for this reason that Basarwa's poverty, marginalization and disadvantage have received very little attention from ethnic minorities, workers' organizations and local civic groups. It was only after the concerted advocacy of Survival International that for instance the two major opposition parties namely the Botswana Congress Party and the Botswana National Front made their positions known about Basarwa. Even then their efforts are ad hoc and are not followed through with intensity. As the situation stands, Basarwa issue has limited political capital in Botswana and it may not influence electoral outcomes as a majority of people in our society do not prioritize it.

Basarwa Powerlessness

The stark reality that emerges from the foregoing discussion is that the interventions of various stakeholders in Basarwa empowerment equation has meant continued powerlessness for Basarwa. The power contests characterized by empty rhetoric and posturing have only served to alienate Basarwa both economically and politically. Basarwa's access to land continues to diminish and their life circumstances continue to be characterized by high levels of deprivation and hopelessness. The power blocs that have developed around Basarwa issue have over time accrued more power and sometimes resources. The disempowerment of Basarwa has meant that the various power blocs consolidate. On aggregate, the situation of the power blocs particularly the life circumstances of critical players in these power blocs, has improved as the situation of Basarwa has either stagnated or deteriorated. Characterising the situation of Basarwa. Good (1996:47) asserted that:

They possess no legal rights to land (unlike all other Batswana) and they have very few or no cattle. Though they were the indigenous peoples of the region and today they have citizenship, they are almost entirely bereft of the resources necessary for adequate subsistence and political participation. The San are an impoverished, exploited underclass who strive on the darkest side of Botswana's democracy.

The power blocs derive their power from the powerlessness of Basarwa. If Basarwa had attained a certain level of power, then, they could easily challenge the power blocs and significantly reduce their power.

Possible Remedies

Basarwa remain poor and powerless and this situation needs urgent resolution. It is imperative that a search for possible remedies be informed by an understanding of the dynamics of power and how the pursuit of same has subordinated Basarwa empowerment to the periphery. In view of this the following possible remedies are suggested:

Opening up the power blocs: To achieve some measure of success in Basarwa empowerment project, it is critical that the power blocs own up and acknowledge their (power bloc) existence. It is important that such acknowledgement be accompanied by a readiness to admit that their existence has become part of the problem for Basarwa. Once this is achieved, the struggle to deconstruct the power puzzle and disentangle the cycle of intrigue and manipulation associated with the competition of the power blocs can be waged.

Embarking on constructive dialogue with Basarwa: It is true that workshops, seminars, conferences or even discussions between the stakeholders are often held but it looks like there has been an absence of a formalised policy dialogue which could produce a complete product that informs the construction of policy for Basarwa. The form of policy dialogue envisaged is one that encompasses all stakeholders but most importantly one that is formal and one whose findings are binding to all stakeholders. This effort should be anchored on the human rights approach to development, and should take into consideration the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as it relates to Botswana's Country Report for 2002 and 2006. In particular recommendation 6 to 16 of the 2006 reports are relevant to the dialogue on Basarwa (See CERD Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 9 of the International Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination). The CERD recommendations are critical in so far as they emphasize the constitutionality, human rights and legal position of ethnic minorities in general and that of Basarwa in particular. They also touch on such critical issues of the composition of ethnic minorities, the efficacy of Basarwa relocation and the fair and just treatment of people on the margins.

Research to deconstruct power bloc dynamics: It is quite evident that if power issues are not addressed, they shall continue to pose obstacles to Basarwa empowerment. Even where an explicit and comprehensive policy exists, issues of power can frustrate efforts to operationalise it. Basarwa research should also be action oriented and it must assist the various stakeholders to appreciate how they contribute to the problem and how they may act to optimise their contribution in the empowerment of Basarwa. Basarwa should also be sensitized to the dynamics of power and how they undermine efforts to empower them.

Empowering Basarwa institutions: An issue that has received inadequate attention is that which concerns the empowerment of institutions that work with Basarwa. At both central and local government levels as well as the level of local NGOs, institutional capacity building has been absent. At a basic level, there are insufficient trained personnel to drive Basarwa empowerment programmes. A study conducted by this author in Kweneng District in 2000 has revealed acute manpower shortages in the implementation of the RADP. Local NGOs working with Basarwa are also under resourced in terms of personnel and fiscal resources. For instance Letsididi (2008:5) in an article in the *Sunday Standard* newspaper reveals how the First People of the Kalahari is collapsing 'under a heavy weight of debt and mismanagement'.

Conclusion

The power blocs that have developed around Basarwa issue are entrenched and possibly they will be very stubborn to deconstruct and demystify. Wittingly or unwittingly, the Basarwa issue has become a convenient platform where various stakeholders express, exercise, demonstrate and showcase their power, influence and control. Basarwa then become a turf for power games and ego aggrandizement for various stakeholders and not targets for genuine empowerment. The lack of synergy in efforts, contradictory policies, absence of decisive action and sensationalized portrayals of Basarwa situation all point to power gimmicks and posturing by the different stakeholders in the Basarwa empowerment project. The genuine empowerment of the Basarwa hinges on the location, definition, debunking and deconstruction of the power puzzle that has become a persistent obstacle in efforts to improve the Basarwa situation.

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