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COMMUNITY STUDIES

By

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This brief presentation focuses upon problems experienced during the resettlement of the remote area dwellers (RADs). In particular, the presentation highlights the difficulty of forging a coherent community among the various social groups that are brought together by a government decree in one settlement. The text is based on the existing literature on the subject and my own field work in the two RAD settlements of Tshokwe in the Bobirwa sub-district of the Central District and Diphuduhudu in the Kweneng District. During my brief stays in Tsabong, I have also come face to face with certain aspects of RAD life. The summary of the presentation is that the programme that was initiated by the Botswana Government to resettle the RADs is not viable in the sense that the affected people, most of whom are Basarwa, face more problems - especially food shortage - in the areas where they are resettled in comparison with the areas they were taken from.

The current Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) began in the 1970s as the Basarwa Development Programme. Later, use of the word Basarwa was viewed to project a negative connotation. Government took the view that the programme would appear tribal in its orientation. As such, the programme was not seen to accord with the national principle of non-tribalism, a policy that underpins national unity. To the contrary, it presented itself as something that was divisive. Hence, the change of name from Basarwa Development Programme to Remote Area Development Programme.

Basarwa have over time learned the skills of surviving in the familiar environment in which they were born and bred. They mastered the movement and behaviour of the fauna and the regimes of the flora. Consequently, they were not dependent on outside assistance for food, even though they ran into food shortage occasionally and were never rich people. Some of the areas formerly occupied by Basarwa have been re-designated game parks or wild life reserves. A key component of the Remote Area Development Programme in the 1980s has been the relocation of various groups of remote area dwellers - most of them Basarwa - from the places they were born in and had lived in, to new settlements, most of them created solely for the purpose of accommodating relocating RADs. In some cases, the main reason for the RADs to be moved was that they should give way to wildlife, in the newly designated game parks and wildlife reserves.

In principle, movement of the RADs to new areas is supposed to be voluntary. In practice, RADs who are told to move are often left without any choice. Often, they are promised services and a generally improved standard of living in the places they are told to go to. However, upon arrival in the new places most RADs experience numerous difficulties. Services such as water, schools and clinics are usually not ready by the time the people arrive. Often, water is bowsered from somewhere else into the settlement. It is not unusual

for vehicles used to bowser water to break down and for residents of the settlements to remain for days without water. Plots for arable production and for building a home are made available and sometimes quite sizeable assistance is given by the government towards ploughing. Nevertheless, this assistance, because it is unorganised and not so well planned and coordinated, is never sufficient to provide an adequate source of livelihood.

Most RADs who settle in these new places experience a deterioration in their standard of living. Those of them who are able to return to their former places usually do. This includes even some RADs who had lived as unpaid herders in the cattleposts of the rich Batswana cattle barons. Their return to a position which they describe as one of servitude means that at least they perceive it as being better than living merely on hope in a new settlement.

Basarwa groups are usually distinguished by dialects and sometimes even languages and lineages. When they are resettled, different groups are brought together in a single locality. Problems of living and working together arise, ending with the stalling of development within the settlement. This problem manifests itself in varying degrees from one settlement to another. For instance, it is more conspicuous in Diphuduhudu than it is in Tshokwe. In Diphuduhudu, one Basarwa clan refused to accept as the headman of the settlement a Mosarwa who came from a different clan. The dissenting clan built their homes (in effect grass domes) far from the other clan and kept themselves away from the rest of the settlement, refusing to associate with the clan from which the headman came. Such lack of social cohesion means that social development which, under current circumstances, depends upon successful clusters of settlement residents around village institutions like the Village Development Committees (VDCs) cannot take place.

This problem of governance points us to an important aspect of Basarwa as an ethnic group of people. There is a tendency to assume that Basarwa are only one group of people with just one language and a uniform culture. Actually, the conflict mirrored for the Diphuduhudu settlement in the last paragraph is a reflection of a wider and deeper difference among the Basarwa. There is no confirmation yet that Basarwa have a common culture. Their transhumant lifestyle, with its hunter-gatherer inclination, is markedly and radically different from that of non Basarwa RADs who live alongside them in the new settlements. Most of these non Basarwa RADs live a sedentary life, based largely on agriculture. Development programmes initiated by the state assume that the culture, aims and lifestyles of all RADs are the same. As human beings, Basarwa and non Basarwa have certain basic needs that are common, but problems that have arisen in the course of implementing development programmes which assume similarities in every thing about these people suggest that the cultural differences are significant and decisive.

There might not be sufficient justification in using the variation in culture among the RADs as an excuse for discontinuing their resettlement in central settlements where they may be served with services. Nevertheless, the diversity in culture among RADs does call for some thought on how these people can be grouped harmoniously in one place. In a sense, this challenge goes beyond the RAD sphere. It squarely faces Botswana, a nation made of various ethnic and tribal groups who also vary in terms of the levels of social development that they have achieved severally and collectively.

Recommended Reading

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INEQUALITIES AND THE SAN: A SUMMARY

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Editors' note: This paper is based on the article "At the Ends of the Ladder: Radical Inequalities in Botswana" published in Journal of Modern African Studies, 31,2,1993, pp.203-230. Interested readers may refer to this paper for a fuller consideration of the points made, and for details of all the references.

In order to understand the present socio-economic position of the San, and to address the question of what might be done to improve this situation, we need to know how they came to be as they are today. In the past their activities were not focused simply upon aboriginal hunting and gathering. For example:

In and after the 8th Century, San across the Kalahari were economically active in the production of salt, ceramics, and metal and ivory ornaments.

Communities were engaged in long-distance trade to the Indian Ocean. Various settlements were established over many centuries. ("San peoples developed and controlled the means of production and trade over large parts of the Kalahari in earlier centuries", Wilmsen and Denbow.)

They were also pastoralists ("the first in Botswana" Wilmsen) controlling in different times and places large herds of bighorned cattle. Evidence for this exists in archaeology (limited); rock paintings (problematic); travellers' accounts; linguistics; and the continuing resurgence of cattle-keeping by various groups over recent decades, against all the odds.

They possessed their own political organizations and leadership, perhaps to around the turn of this century. (Long-distance trade required political organization to operate.)

Their dispossession began slowly and then accelerated, but it seems difficult to underestimate its importance. By c. 1920s, the system of San servitude, say Miers and Crowder, "lay at the very roots of the highly successful Tswana pastoral economy, allowing the masters to build up large herds while freeing them from pastoral (and other) chores and enabling them to engage in politics, herd management, trade, and wage labour."

DIMENSIONS OF CONTEMPORARY INEQUALITIES

1. LAND

San were the original inhabitants of the whole region. Some rock paintings have been dated to 26,000 years BP (Lewis-Williams).