

28 NO. 1 1993

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## Participatory community development in Bophuthatswana

Mary FitzGerald\*

### Introduction

The project documented here, was carried out in Ramogodi, a tribal village in Bophuthatswana which was given "independence" by the South African government in 1977. The territory is governed by a legislative assembly consisting of 48 elected members designated by chiefs and headmen and 3 Presidential appointees. Under the Apartheid system it became the official homeland of the Tswana people.

In addition to the power of the legislature, the Bophuthatswana constitution provides for the retention of tribal customs and controls and the tribal authority structure remains unaltered. The duties of the tribal authorities encompass the management of tribal affairs and advice to the government on local affairs. They are also allowed to levy taxes and the chiefs have considerable power including those of arrest and passing sentence for certain offences (Black Sash, 1990).

Bophuthatswana comprises six separate unconnected regions located on the high South African plateau hundreds of miles inland without direct access to the sea. These regions have a low annual rainfall. No rivers rise in the territory and those which flow through have been dammed outside its borders. (Potgieter, 1977) The preamble to the Bophuthatswana constitution contains a Bill of rights. In spite of this, the country manifests most of the characteristics of a police state. The Black Sash document referred to above describes the situation as follows:-

Within Bophuthatswana, a pervasive system of control and information keeps people in subjection. The network of authoritarian government runs through the whole society. It starts at the centre of power in the President's office in Mmabatho and filters through the structures of bureaucracy at all levels down to the smallest community through the chiefs and headmen, and even their families, to the school principals and officials of the ruling BDP (Bophuthatswana Democratic Party) at quite junior levels. The security forces, too, seem to be omnipresent.

Permission to hold meetings and to engage in self-help activities has to

\*. The writer wishes to acknowledge the help received from Shelagh Clear and Phyllis Konya in editing this article.

be obtained from the chiefs and headmen in tribal areas and from the police elsewhere, with both parties attending meetings. This system of control effectively intimidates the people and serves to demoralise local grass roots community development workers.

## Systems of land tenure

There are three systems of land tenure in Bophuthatswana:

1. Trust land which belongs to the government;
2. Private land owned by individuals or groups; and
3. tribal land on which 54.7% of the population resides.

Potgieter (*Ibid.*) describes the tribal land tenure system as follows:-

Land ownership and tenure under the tribal system means that each tribe has a specific area which in name belongs to the chief but which is actually communally owned by the tribe. Ownership on an individual basis does not exist. Members of the tribe obtain exclusive usage rights on a family basis on land allocated to them, and this right is normally hereditary and not alienable.

Traditionally, the Tswana people in rural areas live in groups which take the form of villages with dwellings scattered over large areas in a haphazard manner. The roads which twist and wind between the houses, are of the dirt variety and are generally impassible in wet weather. The villagers pay an annual levy to the chief of R5 for their plot and an additional R5 for the use of the cemetery.

## Betterment

Betterment, a community development trust, was established in Johannesburg in 1983 with the aim of promoting human development and self-help in poor, marginalised communities. It is financed by the private sector and governed by a Board of Trustees representative of the sponsoring companies. Betterment staff have been involved in promoting adult education and community participation in self-help in Bophuthatswana since 1984. Full community participation is seen as essential in the promotion of human growth and as a means of learning to take responsibility for the solution of local problems. Resource persons, who are employed when necessary, are chosen in terms of their willingness to implement Betterment's policy of consulting residents and of involving them in all phases of a proposed project, and who are prepared to join in participatory evaluation of each phase.

Grass roots community development workers, nominated by their communities of origin, are trained. Staff and trainees enter communities by invitation of the residents.

## History of the Ramogodi water supply project

Ramogodi, which in English means "the place of offal", derives its name from the occupation followed by many villagers of hawking offal bought from a nearby abattoir. Five hundred and one families (population 4086) live on plots measuring 2000<sup>2</sup>m. Approximately 50% of the families have lived in the village for several generations. The remainder consists of people who in the early 1970s were evicted from "white" areas in South Africa in terms of the Group Areas Act No. 36 of 1966. These families came to the village as squatters and later had plots allocated to them.

Houses are self-constructed and range from corrugated iron shacks to baked mud buildings. They are a tribute to their owners' ingenuity rather than to their architectural knowledge. Each yard has a primitive pit latrine, shelters for chickens, goats and dogs, and functions as a general dumping ground for broken down cars and household equipment.

In August 1987, Betterment sent a community development trainee to do her field work in Ramogodi at the invitation of the villagers. She began a needs survey during which a broad range of needs and problems was expressed. The need for a water supply system was the people's priority. The villagers had been dependent on water sellers for their daily supply since 1974. In the early 1960s, the previous headman had employed contractors to install a fairly sophisticated water supply system for which the villagers had borne the cost. It had operated in a progressively deteriorating condition, owing to damage to pipes, rusting of equipment and financial problems for ten years. The scheme ground to a halt shortly after the death of the headman in 1974.

A committee of twenty-four members had been in existence since that time charged with the task of looking at the water problem. At the time of the trainee's arrival in the village, they were still at the "looking" stage and were considering employing a water diviner without any clear idea about what would happen thereafter.

## The process

Several meetings were held between the writer, the committee and varying numbers of villagers. The recurring theme was that all their problems regarding water could be attributed to the death of their "father", the headman. Efforts to encourage them to examine other factors which had played a role in the collapse of the scheme generated resistance. The need for water was urgent and all wanted to proceed to immediate action. Eventually, a few people came to realise that it was not the death of the headman *per se* which had caused the problem, but their own dependence on him, which had rendered them unable to take the necessary action to maintain the scheme.

Once convinced of this, the villagers gradually came to realise that if a

new scheme were to succeed, they would need to try to acquire the knowledge and skills to manage and maintain it. The village lacks the support of any of the externally supplied infra-structural services which exist in urban areas. The provision of a communal water scheme, therefore, called firstly for an examination of the construction phase comprising a socio-demographic survey, a feasibility study, detailed design, preparation of contract documents and physical construction and secondly, of the operation and control of services. This incorporates responsibility for basic administration and for financial and technical control.

Once the role which Betterment would play in assisting the villagers, and the role which they would be expected to play had been clarified, the committee, having waited six months for an appointment, obtained the chief's permission to implement the scheme and sent a formal letter to Betterment requesting help. A consultant civil engineer was called in at the request of the committee.

### The role of the civil engineer

At a meeting, organised by the committee and attended by 300 villagers, the civil engineer presented 5 technical options for consideration and explained the cost and maintenance requirements of each. A reticulated system, which would supply water to communal standpipes at various points in the village was chosen, and an agreement reached that each family would contribute R200 (£40) to the cost of the scheme. The balance was to be provided by Betterment.

A task analysis of the skills which would be needed to construct, operate, manage and maintain the proposed scheme was presented in detail and discussed at length. An undertaking was given to try to find training courses designed for administration, book-keeping, financial planning, construction and maintenance. Since no training facilities were available in Bophuthatswana, arrangements had to be made with a training centre in the Republic of South Africa.

Twenty-one unemployed men, selected by the community, were sent by the civil engineer to be trained as plumbers, pipe layers, builders and a storeman. A young woman was sent for training as a bookkeeper.

From the inception of the project, the civil engineer attended weekly meetings with the committee and monthly community meetings at which feedback was given on progress made and problems being encountered.

The cost of each phase was presented and discussed. The villagers joined in participatory evaluation, examining successes and failures and contributing suggestions.

### The non-formal education input

Non-formal educational processes were emphasised to achieve the objective of community participation. This called for the use of new pedagogical

techniques to encourage both the committee and community to take the initiative in solving local problems.

Most of the first year in Ramogodi was devoted to training the committee. Twelve of the older members found the learning process to be too demanding and withdrew with various face-saving excuses. The remaining twelve, ten women and two men, were highly motivated to learn. At their request a draft constitution was drawn up, an activity which took two days but which provided a valuable learning experience for the staff of Betterment. It served to sensitise us to the members' basic mistrust and insecurity *vis-a-vis* each other and their community.

They wanted clauses inserted to cover every possible contingency and to have powers resembling those of the local police force. In-service training was continued at weekly meetings, at which the constitution was produced and the relevant clause read out each time a member stepped out of line. Three years later, a constitution drawn up by a lawyer, in consultation with the committee, has been adopted and its purpose seems to be fairly well understood.

The NFE programme comprised the opening and administration of savings accounts, the concept of interest, issuing of receipts and record keeping and basic accounting. Special emphasis was placed on teaching and implementing strategies for conflict resolution within the committee and between it and the headman and members of the community.

The committee and volunteers from the village were trained to undertake a socio-demographic survey of the village and to analyse the findings of the 400 survey forms which had been completed.

The surveyors were used as a pilot group and their suggestions for alterations and omissions were incorporated into the final survey document.

### Problems encountered

#### *Grass roots community development workers*

The two workers employed on this project operated satisfactorily at first. Their functioning deteriorated in proportion to the increasing competence of the committee and volunteers. The senior worker considered that the socio-demographic survey was her responsibility and tried to undermine the credibility of the committee in the village. She was suspended, a move which caused hostility towards Betterment. It took three months to resolve this problem. At an evaluatory session during which this incident was discussed, the secretary stated that F. had helped them but that she was "a big tree which did not want small trees to grow".

The second worker took to wandering from house to house, playing Fafi (a Chinese gambling game) with villagers and became totally unproductive. She has been transferred elsewhere.

*Mistrust and suspicion*

It has not been possible to establish a relationship of trust with the villagers. Superficially, all are friendly and co-operative but the facade tends to crack and accusations fly when it becomes necessary for the committee to meet financial commitments specified in their contract. When incidents of this nature occur, the committee is simply encouraged to study the contract.

*Democratic succession*

It has not been possible to ascertain whether the committee was elected, nominated or self-elected. Membership of a committee serves to give status to black South Africans to whom most other avenues of power are closed. This causes people to hang on to their membership and results in committees becoming closed groups. The Ramogodi committee is no exception. According to their constitution, an annual general meeting at which an election should take place is supposed to be held.

Efforts to motivate the committee to meet this requirement have proved futile with the excuse varying from year to year. In the early stages of the project the story was that they were the only residents who understood the situation. Later, only they were prepared to work so hard for the village, and currently it is the fear that young people who would "cat" the people's money may be elected.

*Nepotism*

As outsiders to the village, Betterment staff did not know the people who were selected for training by the community. On their return to work on the project, they, together with the civil engineer, were formally employed by the committee to which they were responsible. A series of problems was encountered resulting from alcoholism, unwillingness to carry out instruction, absence from work and refusal to account to either the committee or the civil engineer.

Weekly meetings became a complaint session about the bookkeeper and other staff. Efforts to examine the underlying cause of the problem were met with resistance and the responsibility was projected on to the Training Centre. It was necessary to wait for a crisis caused by the bookkeeper's failure to pay the workmen before the committee was ready to discuss the real reason for their problem – the whole village was family and they had chosen family members for training. The committee then had the painful task of sacking the unsatisfactory employees, Betterment staff having refused to be manipulated into doing this for them.

*Dependency*

The villagers' dependency on the deceased headman has been referred to. Their dependency on white people, a product of their history, also created

many problems. Their choice of the most expensive water supply scheme was not, as the writer and her colleagues simplistically believed, based on an assessment of the cost, maintenance and management requirements. Contrary to what had been explained to them, they seemed to have believed that the "whites" would make no demands on them and would supply the where-with-all for the scheme. Their subsequent disillusionment has been a source of problems for the committee charged with the collection of the R200 which was pledged by each family.

**The outcome**

An initial hydrological survey indicated that there were several sources of underground water in the village. Eight unsuccessful drilling attempts disproved this, but the ninth yielded 6000 gallons per hour, more than enough to meet the needs of the village. Twenty-five standpipes have been installed in the yards of trusted villagers and only those who have contributed to the scheme are permitted to obtain water.

The committee is solely responsible for the administration of the scheme. Each family pays a monthly levy of R6. This covers the cost of electricity for the generator with the balance being deposited in a capital account which will provide for the cost of maintenance and repairs.

An unanticipated side effect has been the return of 100 families who had left the village. In a recent interview with a journalist, the committee secretary stated; "The young ones who went away to the city have learnt that there is water. They are coming back. They say there is life in the village again." The return of economically active young adults has served to generate hope for the future in the village where there is a very high level of social disorganisation manifested in alcoholism, drug addiction, adult crime and juvenile delinquency.

Betterment, the name of the trust, comes from Batten's view that community development should contribute to the "betterment of the poor and underprivileged people who need it most". (Batten, 1968) Its philosophy and *modus operandi* have been strongly influenced by his writings, now considered obsolete by the users of concepts like "empowerment" and "participation", both of which are implicit in the non-directive approach which he advocates. Implementation of this approach, while being very simple in theory, proves to be time-consuming and frustrating in practice. The temptation to get on with the task oneself can be very strong when the community is dragging its feet by engaging in long and apparently fruitless discussion.

The knowledge that human growth and development are slow processes which cannot be forced, and the belief that people are capable of transcending their present limitations help to counter the tendency to try to rush things or to resort to flight.

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# Community development: a national strategy in Zimbabwe

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Mazula

## Introduction

Four years after Zimbabwe's Independence in 1980, the then Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe (now President), issued a Prime Ministerial Directive whose intention was to change the entire colonial structure of Provincial administration to one in which the six million rural people living in Zimbabwe's 8 provinces could participate and affect the development process newly emerging in the reconstruction of the country after the long Independence struggle. The basic unit of organisation in this new structure was to be the VIDCO (Village Development Committee) comprised of 6 members democratically elected by the adults of the village. The role of the committee was to plan and coordinate all development activities at village level and to report to the next level up in the structure, the WADCO (Ward Development Committee), whose function was to coordinate the work of 6 VIDCOs (approximately 6,000 people) who would make up the Ward. These two grass roots tiers could reach through the District and Provincial Councils, and the Development Plans emanating from them, to the decision makers at national government level.

The focus of this paper is on the cadre of extension workers, the Village Community Workers (VCWs), formed to work with the VIDCOs: on their origin and deployment and on the design and implementation of their training. This training was exciting, dramatic and totally innovative in Zimbabwe, using a clearly stated and defined pedagogy of dialogue and participation based on the principles of adult education expounded by Paulo Freire (1972).

## Context

... context, of which this programme represents a very small  
... early 1980s was illustrated by clearly articulated socialistic  
... goals aimed at eradicating rural under-development. The  
... of provincial administration down to the grass roots level was  
... provide an organisational and civic environment which would  
... the mass mobilisation of human and material resources to reach  
... the Ministry of Community, Cooperative Development and