Ethnicity and participatory development methods in Botswana: some participants are to be seen and not heard

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As participatory methods are increasingly preferred in the effort to develop communities, and as development initiatives increasingly take place at the grassroots, practitioners are discovering that ethnicity and ethnic identity are among the most important factors influencing the opportunities for change at village level in most African countries. This paper discusses the understanding and practice of participatory development methods in Botswana. In particular, it examines the role that ethnicity plays in determining the involvement of the various ethnic communities in development planning, and in community decision-making processes more generally.

After delineating the concept of ethnicity, the article describes the traditional consultation process in Botswana, with the *kgosi* (chief) as the key player in the process. It will be shown how this process systematically excluded ethnic-minority groups. The implications of ethnicity for present-day village consultation in rural Botswana will then be analysed. In the concluding section, the authors identify five problem areas for participatory development methods and indicate how such methods could possibly address these problems.

To illustrate ethnic prejudice and exclusion, the article uses experiences from a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) project that was commissioned by Botswana's Ministry of Finance and Development Planning in 1995–1996.[1] The general objective of this project was to assess the potential use of PRA in existing development-planning practices. Teams of extension workers in four districts were trained in PRA and subsequently applied it in selected villages. Having produced village-development plans through these exercises, which took about two weeks per village, the project also assessed their implementation after several months (Prinsen et al. 1996).

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Defining ethnicity

'Ethnicity' is an anthropological term that came into conventional usage in the 1960s to refer to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as culturally distinctive. It is concerned with the sense of belonging or affiliation to a cultural-linguistic group and the uniqueness of such a group. The term denotes a social identity which is both collective and individual, externalised in social interactions, internalised in personal self-awareness, and publicly expressed (Jenkins 1999). A necessary accompaniment of 'ethnicity' is some consciousness of kind among members of an 'ethnic group', which can be defined as a subsection or subsystem more or less distinct from the rest of the population, and is based on membership defined by a sense of common historical origin, shared culture, language, value orientation, shared social norms, and sometimes religion (Schermerhorn 1996; Banks 1996). According to Tonkin *et al.* (1996: 22), the terms 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' 'seem to have rediscovered, even without intention, the "us" and "them". ... In their common employment, the terms have a strong and familiar bias towards "difference" and "otherness".' Therefore, 'ethnicity' is concerned with identity and distinctiveness of an 'ethnic group' (Banks 1996) and is something that inheres in every group that is self-identifying (Tonkin et al. 1996).

However, the term 'ethnicity' has undergone a gradual shift as an analytical framework from a term that merely denotes 'ethnic affiliation' to a concept increasingly characterised by negative interactions and competition between ethnic groups (see Nnoli 1995; Clements and Spinks 1994; Braathen et al. 2000). Thus, it manifests itself in phenomena such as cultural stereotyping and socio-economic and political discrimination. Stereotyping does not allow people to be judged and treated as individuals in their own right. Instead, 'the other person is labeled as having certain characteristics, weaknesses, laziness, lack of honesty and so on, and these labels obscure all the other thinking about the person' (Clements and Spinks 1994:14). These labels result in prejudice, which encompasses negative assumptions and pre-judgements about other groups, who are believed to be inferior. As such, prejudice is rooted in power—the power of being a member of a primary group and feeling more important than people in 'secondary' groups. Ultimately, the feeling of exclusiveness as a group, and the negative images held about other groups, lead to discrimination, which Clements and Spinks (1994) see as 'prejudice in action'.

Participatory development

Participatory development methods are born out of the recognition of the uniqueness of an individual as an entity who is capable of making unique contributions to decision making. Currently, participatory methods are very much in vogue in development thinking. The entire spectrum of development agencies, from grassroots organisations to the World Bank, seems to have embraced the concept of participation in development planning and implementation (Chambers 1994a, b, c; World Bank 1994). The major actor who is expected to participate is the 'community', an entity that is hardly ever described beyond 'all those living in a certain geographic area'. However, although various authors have pointed out that a community is rarely a homogeneous entity (Butcher *et al.* 1993; Clark 1973; Plant 1974), very little research has been done to determine the precise nature and workings of the heterogeneous rural African village.

PRA is a method that seeks to maximise the equal involvement of all adult members of a community in planning their collective development. It is purported to overcome cultural, political, and economic barriers to meaningful participation in development planning. However, the literature on this popular consultation method focuses almost exclusively on the stakes held by different material interest groups (rich versus poor, pastoralists versus settled farmers) or by men versus women (Mosse 1994). It deals far less with the cultural dichotomy of superior versus subordinate ethnic groups.[2] This is probably a result of two factors. First, most writers on participatory methods in Africa are of European or North American origin. Even though they may have extensive experience in a particular African country, they are less likely to comprehend the subtle details of ethnic identities in most of these countries. Indeed, the average child in a sub-Saharan African country, having been socialised to ethnic divides from birth, can probably multiply several times over the list of ethnic identities that a European or North American is able to identify.

Second, the minority of sub-Saharan Africans who write on participatory methods may be hesitant to address the matter of ethnicity, because the concept effectively undermines the foundations of their already rather weak 'nation-states' (Davidson 1992). Indeed, recent history in sub-Saharan Africa shows horrifying experiences of what happens when ethnic identity prevails over national identity.

Notwithstanding the above, the issue of ethnicity cannot be ignored when community participation is becoming a cornerstone for

development planning. This is not only because most communities are composed of different ethnic groups, but because if participatory development efforts prioritise the most marginalised areas for intervention, as they often do, then it is likely that it is precisely these areas that are also characterised by strong ethnic divisions.

From the above, it is clear that ethnicity is antagonistic to the basic concepts underlying participatory methods. Ethnicity has exclusiveness, prejudice, and discrimination as core characteristics. Participatory methods, on the other hand, have taken as their cornerstone liberal concepts such as 'one person one vote' and 'the freedom of one should not be to the detriment of another'.

Socio-political realities of ethnicity in Botswana

By custom, the major ethnic groups in Botswana, called *Tswana*, were organised in villages according to distinct sub-groups, such as *Bakwena, Bangwaketse, Bakgatla*, and *Batlokwa*. However, villages were not necessarily formed of ethnically homogeneous groups of people. They were further divided into specific sub-ethnic groups (*merafe* and *meratshwana*) that were associated with particular wards, according to kinship or common ancestry. In this context, *merafe* refers to people belonging to one of the *Tswana* groups that constitutes the regional majority, and *meratshwana* refers to all other ethnic groups. A ward was made up of a number of family groups or households, most of whom would be related to the ward head, while others would be family groups from other ethnic groups placed under the head's care (Ngcongco 1989).

The arrangement of wards within a village was such that the highly regarded wards were located close to the *Kgosing* ward (the main ward, where the *kgosi* lived), and the wards that were poorly regarded on ethnic grounds were situated on the outskirts. Thus, the subordinate ethnic groups were physically relegated from the social, cultural, and political life of the village. The importance attached by villagers to this physical separation extends, at least in some cases, to the deceased. For example, one of the plenary sessions dealing with the village map in Artesia became hotly debated, as one of the villagers complained to the audience that his late aunt, related to the *kgosi*, was buried too close to the graveyard for subordinate ethnic groups. What was contested was whether the two graveyards were or were not too close to each other, not whether there should be two separate graveyards (Botswana Orientation Centre 1996a).

The inhabitants of the subordinate wards were marginalised in many respects. For instance, Datta and Murray (1989:59) note that *Batawana* and *Bayei* tended to have a master–serf relationship, with *Bayei* seemingly '... accepting their lower status in that they would refer to themselves as *Makuba* (useless people), the *Batawana* term for *Bayei*'. Similarly, *Bakgalagadi* in the *Bangwaketse* and *Bakwena* areas show acceptance of their lower status by referring to the dominant groups as *Bakhgweni*, which connotes 'master'.

This pattern, in which the negative 'image of the other' of the dominant group is incorporated as the 'image of the self' by the subordinate group, completes a cycle of repression to which resistance can develop only with difficulty. If a subordinate group wished to oppose the *status quo*, it would have to start with the most difficult part of change: reversing its self-perception; that is, thinking of the world upside down (Freire 1972). The situation described above was observed during the PRA project.

The PRA process involved the selection and training of ten people in each village to assist in the proceedings and to lead project implementation when the PRA team was gone. As villagers were 'free' to elect their trainees, almost invariably members of the dominant ethnic group were elected. Even subordinate ethnic groups generally tended to vote for a candidate of the dominant group. The well-entrenched belief among the ethnic-minority groups was 'We cannot speak so eloquently and do not understand things.' In the case of Kedia, the authors learned that once, owing to external pressure, a member of the subordinate ethnic group of *Basarwa* was appointed supervisor of a construction programme in which most labourers also belonged to the subordinate ethnic group. Soon the labourers requested the *kgosi* to appoint somebody from his own ethnic group, claiming that their supervisor was often absent, could not manage the work, and drank too much. In short, they did not want one of their own group as supervisor (Botswana Orientation Centre 1996b).

As an almost inevitable consequence of these ethnically related imbalances of power, subordinate ethnic groups were systematically impoverished by being denied the right to own cattle and access to land and water. Consequently, their livelihoods were usually relegated to economically and ecologically marginal areas, and some groups, such as the *Basarwa*, were even forced to become hereditary serfs, called *balata, balala,* or *batlhanka* (Datta and Murray 1989). This relationship relegated *Basarwa* to the level of personal and private property.

Systematic impoverishment is a major source of concern for the ethnic-minority communities in Botswana. The introduction of the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) in 1975 is a case in point. This policy commercialised huge areas of land that were formerly communally owned around the Kalahari desert, resulting in the annexation of land from the indigenous people of the area, particularly *Bakgalagadi* and *Basarwa*, and its re-allocation to the more economically powerful members of the majority ethnic groups from all over Botswana. Large numbers of the indigenous people of the area were forced to work for the new master-landowners (Mogalakwe 1986). In Kedia, for example, the PRA exercise stimulated a discussion about opportunities to develop a rather marginal area of 33,000 ha which was 40 km away from the village but nevertheless belonged to it. The introduction of livestock, wildlife management, and commercial production of veldproducts were suggested options. While the dominant ethnic group considered the ideas with enthusiasm, the suggestions were a source of major discomfort to members of the ethnic minorities. They used the land for hunting and for gathering veldproducts, and were afraid of losing access to it if it was commercialised (Botswana Orientation Centre 1996b).

Stratification of communities according to ethnicity is not only visible in the physical set-up of villages and the social, economic, and political relations among ethnic groups, but is also enshrined and protected in Sections 77 and 78 of the Constitution of Botswana (1965). These Sections of the supreme law of the country legitimise the superiority of the eight so-called major tribes, all belonging to the *Tswana* (*Bakgatla, Bakwena, Balete, Barolong, Bangwato, Bangwaketse, Batlokwa*, and *Batawana*). All other ethnic groups in the country are usually referred to as ‘minor’, ‘subordinate’, or ‘subject’ groups.

Although the Constitution explicitly mentions eight major tribes, the issue of ethnicity is downplayed under the motto ‘We are all *Batswana*’. Thus, there is no official government record with data related to ethnicity. For example, population censuses do not contain reference to ethnicity. Therefore, it is difficult to determine how many people belong to a particular ethnic group or know the proportion of the *Tswana* to other ethnic groups in Botswana’s 1.5 million population. Consequently, Hitchcock (1992) resorts to extrapolating such figures from the 1946 census dating from the time of the colonial Bechuanaland Protectorate Government, which describes 70 per cent of the population as belonging to the eight *Tswana* sub-groups and the

remaining 30 per cent to minority groups, most of which have their own languages (*Bakgalagadi, Balala, Basarwa, Batswapong, Bayei, Herero, Kalanga, Mbukushu, Nama, Pedi, Subiya, Teti*).

Consultation in traditional society

The understanding and practice of 'consultation' is not much different in Botswana from that in the West. Consultation is a process through which decision makers and planners solicit the views of the people for whom decisions are being made. An important feature of consultation is that the consulting party does not necessarily have to use the views of those consulted.

Botswana had, and still has, an extensive consultation system to inform decisions. Traditionally, the key player in this process was the *kgosi* (chief). The *kgosi* headed the governance system and was the custodian of the custom, culture, and welfare of his people. He ruled over his subjects through ward heads, who were appointed by him. The ward heads connected their own people to the *kgosi* and vice versa (Ngcongco 1989). However, they were more accountable to the *kgosi* than to their subjects. Although the strong convention of consultation played an important role in checking against the risk of absolutism on the part of the chief, nothing compelled him to consult his advisers. Consequently, while the *kgosi* would from time to time meet with his subjects to 'consult', this consultation meant predominantly the imparting of information or issuing of instructions.

The *kgosi* promulgated new laws at the *kgotla*. The *kgotla* is a traditional meeting place found in all *Tswana* communities, which the *kgosi* used 'to advise or admonish his followers as well as to impart information to them' (Ngcongco 1989:44). The persuasive skills and power of the *kgosi* in this regard were critical. So too was the role of the *malope a kgosi* (commoners who do things in order to be loved by the chief or to receive favours from him), who helped to detect and discourage any dissenting views.

The following example from the PRA project illustrates the importance of the continuing role of the *malope a kgosi*. Ethnic conflict was rife in Artesia, and the *kgosi* and the ethnic minorities upheld several conflicts. In order to circumvent the effects of power imbalance, the PRA project team organised separate sessions in the ward of the ethnic minority. This proved to enhance their participation greatly on the first day. However, on the second day the villagers observed that one of the village elders (*lelope*) noted down names of villagers who

spoke out against the established order. Once villagers became aware of this, most of them withdrew from the meeting. In the evening, the conflict expanded, when all the villagers who were elected to be trainees threatened to quit. They informed the project team that the elder was summoned to the *kgosi* every evening to report on 'who said what'. They did not want to get into trouble with the *kgosi*. The problem was solved after extensive talks with all parties involved (Botswana Orientation Centre 1996a).

In practice, there was very little room for debate once the *kgosi* had issued his orders; 'the *kgotla* after all is not a participatory but a consultative institution' (Molutsi 1989:115). Participation in this context denotes people actively taking part in the decision-making process, whereas consultation entails being informed about decisions to be or already taken. In short, the word of the *kgosi* was highly respected and was almost always final. Hence the *Setswana* saying '*Lefoko la kgosi le agelwa mosako'*, meaning 'The word of the *kgosi* is to be supported and respected by all'. In this respect, the *kgosi* was regarded almost as an omnipotent being. As will be explained shortly, consultation in modern Botswana differs a little from the way in which it was conceptualised traditionally.

Ethnic exclusionism in the community forum

Theoretically, all adult members of the community have unrestricted right of speech at the *kgotla*. This principle is reflected in the *Tswana* proverb '*Mmua lebe o abo a bua la gagwe*', meaning 'Everybody is free to speak out, and even to make mistakes'. However, practice in traditional communities was very different, as subordinate groups were denied participation. The perpetuators took comfort in this practice by blaming the victim. For example, in the case of the discrimination practised by *Bangwaketse* against *Bakgalagadi*, the usual explanation given was that by nature *Bakgalagadi* are timid and bashful, and find it difficult to stand up and speak at gatherings (Ngcongco 1989).

The agenda of the *kgotla* meeting was the responsibility of the *kgosi*, and only on rare occasions could ordinary members of the *merafe* (not the *meratshwana*) add to the *kgosi's* agenda through their ward heads. Participation, in the sense of 'having a say' in this kind of decision-making process, was restricted. Only a few people could participate, and these included the chief's uncles and brothers (who were also the chief's advisers) and members of the dominant ethnic groups. In an ethnically heterogeneous community, these restrictions

were rigidly enforced. For instance, in *Bakwena* and *Bangwaketse* areas, *Bakgalagadi* were not, as a rule, expected to speak at the *kgotla*, even though they were free to attend like any other *Motswana*. 'As children in the home, they were to be seen and not to be heard. ... *Bakgalagadi* were children and their overlords were the ones who could and did speak for them' (Ngcongco 1989:46).

Even the physical arrangement of the *kgotla* indicated its undemocratic nature. The *kgosi* sat in front, surrounded by his advisers—mostly his male relatives and a few handpicked village elders. Immediately behind the chief's advisers sat the *merafe*, and behind them the *meratshwana*. This pattern was also observed in all villages where PRA plenary sessions took place at the *kgotla*. The male members of subordinate ethnic groups hardly spoke, and then usually only when directly addressed. Women and youngsters of ethnic minorities almost never spoke. They were seen but not heard. When one of the PRA team members naïvely suggested once that the *kgosi* should also solicit the views of people from the ethnic-minority wards, the *kgosi* looked at them and replied: 'Ah, these people never come to the *kgotla*, I cannot see them' (Botswana Orientation Centre 1996a:3).

In this regard, the *kgotla* provides a forum for the dominant ethnic groups to exercise power and authority. It is natural, therefore, that the groups in power will feel threatened when members of the subordinate groups attempt to speak in this forum, as this is viewed as undermining their power-base. This point is illustrated in an interview conducted by Ngcongco (1989:46) with a *Mongwaketse* elder who related an incident that demonstrated the undemocratic nature of the *kgotla*. 'A member of the *Bakgalagadi* who attempted to speak at a particular *kgotla* meeting was rudely pulled down by *Bangwaketse*, who said: "*Nna hatshe o tla re tlholela*." This literally meant: "Sit down, you will bring us bad luck."'

The following example shows how a *kgosi* used a police officer to enforce this practice of ethnic exclusionism during the PRA pilot project. In Kedia the authors observed a participatory planning meeting in which one particular woman from a subordinate ethnic group spoke out loudly against discriminatory practices of the dominant group. It was evident that she was helped in breaking gender and ethnic rules by a serious intake of alcohol, but quite a number of other participants were also rather inebriated. The *kgosi* quickly pointed at a policeman, who took the woman by the arm, lifted her off the ground, and brought her to the shade of a tree about 50 metres from the meeting place. Thereafter, the meeting continued as if nothing had happened.

Participatory methods aim to change such practices by involving people directly in the decision-making processes that affect their lives and livelihoods.

Consultation in present-day Botswana

In the opening lines of a paper presented to a conference on Democracy in Botswana, Mpho (1989:133) observed that 'Democracy appears to exist in Botswana because the majority of the people belonging to the so-called "minority" tribes have remained peaceful and patient about their oppression.' However, this situation is changing. One reason for this change is the deepening socio-economic inequality in the country. Botswana receives ever-increasing revenues from diamond mining, and the country has risen from being a very low-income country in the 1960s (with a per capita income of US$22 at independence in 1966) to a middle-income country in 1995 (per capita income of US$3,082). Nevertheless, this wealth is very unevenly distributed, with the richest 20 per cent of the population receiving 61 per cent of the total national income, while the poorest 40 per cent, many of whom belong to subordinate ethnic groups, receive only 9 per cent (MFDP 1997:3). At the same time, however, the economic boom led to an extensive and well-developed infrastructure, which increased mobility and educational levels. This development empowered ethnic minorities to challenge the *status quo*. Increasingly, ethnic groups at the lower end of the ladder now organise themselves and voice protests, even though this is still incomprehensible to members of the dominant ethnic groups.[3]

Against this background of, on the one hand, a rather rigid, ethnically stratified social order and, on the other, an increasingly mobile society in which traditional values are being eroded and in which subordinate ethnic groups question the *status quo*, the government has built a long-standing practice of 'consulting' villagers on development. Since independence in 1966, the government has formulated five-year development plans to inform and guide its path of development. Preceding the making of a new development plan, district-level extension teams visit all villages and hold meetings, in which the villagers put forward the needs and wishes that they would like to see incorporated in the upcoming development plan (Byram *et al.* 1995). This consultation process takes place along lines similar to those used by the chiefs. Every village has elected members of a Village Development Committee (VDC), which is a body charged with leading development programmes at village level. In ethnically heterogeneous

communities, members of the VDC usually belong almost exclusively to the dominant ethnic group, and the *kgosi* is an *ex officio* member. VDCs are similar, therefore, to the traditional union of the *kgosi* and his advisers. The *kgosi* and ward heads manage the community's internal relations, while they gather in the VDC to deal with its relations with government. The exercise in which government officers descend on villagers to 'consult' on development plans always takes place at the *kgotla*. The VDC does the groundwork by informing and consulting villagers beforehand, and as such the actual consultation exercise at the *kgotla* bears resemblance to a ritual—pleasing to those who feel comfortable with the customary social order, but unappreciated by others.

This consultation process is now facing problems and increasing criticism from various sides. The number of villagers attending the *kgotla* is steadily declining. The chiefs complain nationwide that people no longer heed their calls to come to the *kgotla*. This may have two explanations. First, villagers from subordinate groups no longer wish to partake in a ritual in which they have no right to stand up and speak (while the chiefs no longer have the authority to enforce attendance). Second, villagers may feel that their input into government's planning is not taken seriously, because they hardly get any feedback, nor do they see their input really influencing policies and practices. This problem arose during the PRA project, as described below.

A recurrent complaint of every chief involved in the PRA project was that 'villagers no longer come to *kgotla* when I call them'. Indeed, a low and/or declining attendance of villagers at the *kgotla* was a continuous worry for the PRA team (Botswana Orientation Centre 1996a, b, c, d). The matter of low attendance at the *kgotla* has various causes, one of which is the diminishing authority of the chiefs without the void being filled by others. On the other hand, the pilot project revealed extensive proof that villagers do not feel treated respectfully in the established consultation procedures. Group-interviewed respondents in eight of the nine villages researched almost unanimously concluded that they are 'treated like children' in consultations (Prinsen et al. 1996:28).

Another criticism of the consultation process comes from government officers. With an increasing frequency and openness, the government expresses its disappointment with the disappearing 'self-help spirit', one of the nation's leading principles (MFDP 1994:7). It is concluded that *Batswana* have become increasingly dependent upon government to provide them with infrastructure and the commodities

and amenities of life, without making any contribution themselves. Government sees proof of this in the ever-recurring 'shopping lists' that villages produce after the consultations.

The last criticism comes from planners and analysts. In their view, as government has invested heavily in infrastructure over the past two decades, development now needs to shift focus. First, ' ... the initiative must be seized by those in the private sector', because too few viable economic enterprises have emerged from the citizenry (MFDP 1991:28). Second, the time has come to look at the quality of service provision or the 'poor productivity' of civil servants (MFDP 1994:9). Both these areas need a forum for dialogue between citizens and the state that is qualitatively well beyond the present practice.

Conclusions: problems and opportunities

In view of the problems with the long-practised approach to consultation, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning piloted Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) over 13 months in 1995–1996 in four of the country's ten districts. Besides trying to address the inherent inadequacies of consultation as practised in Botswana, the Ministry also felt, in line with international trends, that 'there is significant evidence that participation can in many circumstances improve the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of projects' (World Bank 1994: i).

In the light of the above discussion, it will be clear that the issue of ethnicity was politically far too sensitive to be addressed explicitly in the PRA project. However, the practical experiences acquired during the project clearly revealed the tensions between various ethnic groups and the traditional consultation structures, on the one hand, and the Western liberal values underlying participatory methods, on the other. These tensions create obstacles for meaningful and effective participatory planning exercises. Sometimes during the project, PRA offered opportunities to surmount or circumvent these obstacles. However, there were also instances where it could not offer workable solutions. A preliminary inventory of the obstacles results in five categories of problems related to ethnicity; these are listed below, with some of the opportunities that PRA offers to address them.

Physical segregation

Subordinate ethnic groups may be invisible at first glance: their houses, their livelihoods, and even their cemeteries may be separated (subtly or otherwise) from those of the dominant groups. Not only can this

apparent invisibility lead to their being overlooked altogether, but when participatory methods deal with the physical planning of a village, ignorance of minorities' physical segregation may further damage their interests. Even assisting in developing their marginal income resources may require scrutiny, as subordinate ethnic groups may lose their access to these resources to dominant groups, once such resources become more attractive.

To overcome these pitfalls, some PRA techniques (transects, random household interviews, farm sketches) take the facilitators (i.e. extension workers, planners, and other professionals) away from its central meeting places. Provided that these outsiders observe well and ask open questions (assuming that their guides feel free to talk in such informal settings), the outcomes of these enquiries may be raised in plenary PRA reporting to the village at large.

Political exclusion

Participatory methods usually require the establishment of a community-based committee to serve as a counterpart or complementary body to external development agents. These committees play a central role in implementing and following up development activities. Generally, the fact that the community has elected the committees satisfies the participatory requirement by external development agents of having empowered the community to be the local partner. However, it may well be that subordinate groups are effectively excluded from these committees. Subsequently, the local partner may use its 'empowerment' to further marginalise subordinate groups under the guise of democratic elections.

Temporary and outsider-initiated interventions can rarely change power balances directly. Participatory programmes are no exception. It can only be hoped that subordinate groups gradually develop a claim-making power through small-group work, careful facilitation, and confidence-building activities. However, this may well require a continued role for the outsiders in monitoring and carefully following up the activities at grassroots level. This continued involvement in events at village level will be legitimised only as long as the outsiders' contribution to development is appreciated or at least tolerated by the ethnically dominant groups.

Prejudice and feelings of inferiority

Even when problems of political and administrative exclusion are overcome through participatory methods, and subordinate ethnic

groups take a seat in the community organisations that join hands with development agents, the ethnic minority's contribution may be limited. Their self-esteem and perception of their skills and capacities may be so low that they are prevented from making a significant contribution. Simultaneously, dominant groups will continuously reproduce negative attitudes towards the subordinate groups in these organisations.

Participatory methods are often based on working in small groups. A repressive atmosphere is less likely to be felt and enforced in such groups, especially if their work takes place outside the symbolic courts of power. If properly facilitated, these small groups offer a learning opportunity for subordinate groups to practise negotiating skills and build self-confidence. It should be noted, however, that often the outsiders (especially government officers) also belong to the dominant ethnic groups. Consequently, they may also display prejudices in their interaction with ethnic minorities. It is, therefore, very important for outsiders to be self-critical.

Reprisals

Even if outsiders succeed in involving subordinate ethnic groups in local development processes, there may be reprisals against these groups for defying the *status quo*. It is unlikely that the local powers will take such 'corrective' measures while the outsiders are around. But the danger of reprisals is real as soon as the outsiders have left. It is also unlikely that upon their return to the village the outsiders will be made aware of these reprisals. Subordinate ethnic groups are very conscious of the risk of reprisals and will normally withdraw before they expose themselves to such risks.

One of the central objectives of participatory methods is to give people control over procedures, plans, and events. This is especially important when working with subordinate groups. The more these groups feel in control, the less likely they will be to venture into areas where they can expect reprisals. Participatory methods do not offer opportunities to address the problem of reprisals by dominant ethnic groups but, if carefully and properly applied, they can prevent the problem arising.

Risk avoidance

Participatory methods are based on the assumption that people are able and willing to voice their interests and that they mean what they say. However, in ethnically divided communities, subordinated ethnic

groups may be unwilling to voice their views on their medium- and long-term interests, when this could immediately destabilise or endanger their limited certainties and self-image, however feeble these may seem to outsiders. Development projects usually aim to change, i.e. improve, an existing situation. However, for many ethnic minorities living on the brink of survival, avoiding risk and maintaining the status quo are paramount priorities. This attitude is largely the culmination of all the problems elaborated above, and it will not begin to change until the weight of these problems decreases.

The inventory presented above has explicitly been called 'preliminary' because an understanding of the implications of ethnicity for participatory development methods is only beginning to emerge, along with their increased use. This inventory is preliminary also because it is based on experiences in the particular context of Botswana. As explained, the strengthening and expanding state apparatus in Botswana has created tensions between the traditional and ethnically oriented socio-political order and the modern liberal Western order. In this process, traditional systems seem to lose power to the new order, thus potentially creating room for subordinate ethnic groups to exert themselves politically. However, it is unclear whether this space exists, and whether participatory methods can broaden it in those African countries where the state apparatus is crumbling. Nevertheless, at this stage, it is already clear that participatory methods are likely to remain scratches on the surface of the ethnically coloured African rural reality, unless its practitioners are able and willing to address ethnicity and ethnic identity openly.

Glossary

Batswana: A term officially used to indicate a citizen of Botswana (singular: *motswana*). However, in an ethnic context it may also refer to members of the dominant eight *Tswana* sub-groups, sharing at least the same language, even though they may differ in some cultural practices.

Kgosi: Chief.

Kgotla: A traditional meeting place, especially for the major ethnic *Tswana* groups.

Merafe: A term that refers to villagers belonging to the dominant ethnic group in a particular village.

Meratshwana: A term that refers to all villagers who do not belong to the dominant ethnic group in a particular village.

Tswana: The majority ethnic group in Botswana, composed of eight sub-groups which have only slightly different cultural practices and share the same language.

Setswana: An official language in Botswana (mainly spoken by members of the dominant eight *Tswana* sub-groups).

Notes

1 A precise description of what PRA entails is not necessary here. In brief, it is a popular participatory planning technique in which outsiders (i.e. government officers, employees of NGOs and/or donor agency representatives) co-operate with local people in undertaking a number of steps based on special techniques for gathering and analysing information. The various steps assess the features and resources of the community, identify problems and opportunities, and then prioritise actions to address the problems. For further details see Chambers (1983, 1994) and the monthly publications of the International Institute of Environment and Development.

2 The major exception in this respect are publications about particular ethnic groups—usually minorities referred to as the 'indigenous people'—whose history, culture, and lifestyle differ strongly from other ethnic groups in a country and have attracted favourable attention from the international community (e.g. Pygmies in Cameroon or Bushmen (*San, Basarwa*) in Botswana and Namibia). Hitchcock's (1986) inventory suggests that in four decades more than 150 academics or professionals, from at least five universities, dedicated studies to the *Basarwa*, a minority of about 40,000 people in Botswana.

3 An Assistant Minister is quoted in a newspaper as having said to a *Basarwa* delegation: 'You think these outsiders [donor agencies] will always help you. Well, one of these days they will be gone and then there will only be us, and we own you and we will own you till the end of time' (Good 1996:59).

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