
Issues in service and volunteerism in Botswana

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Abstract

Volunteerism, prominent in Botswana's development, declined in the 1980s, but re-emerged in the 1990s following the government's emphasis on cost sharing, participation, mutual social responsibility, state-community partnerships and social justice in addressing socio-economic development. The article discusses the evolution and the concept of service in the country, which reflects both "traditional" and "modern" ideas about service. The issues and challenges arising from the changing national socio-economic development context, the gender, class and age profile of servers, and institutional and organisational aspects are considered, concluding with a call for the review and redirection of service policies and programmes in Botswana.

Key words

Service; volunteerism; social policy; gender

Introduction

Service and volunteering have been part of African social life since pre-colonial times and have undergone many changes. Both “traditional” and “modern” features of service exist, and diverse socio-economic, ideological, cultural, religious and institutional factors shape the nature and form of service. The article contends that volunteerism declined in Botswana during the 1980s due to, among other reasons, increased state social welfare provision. Since the 1990s, however, following the adoption of the government’s long-term socio-economic development vision, service has re-emerged. The new vision is contained in a policy document titled *Vision 2016 – Towards Prosperity for All* (Presidential Task Group for Long Term Vision for Botswana, 1997). It identifies seven major themes that the nation should strive towards, and these are an educated, informed nation; a prosperous, productive and innovative nation; a compassionate, just and caring nation; a safe and secure nation; an open, democratic and accountable nation; a moral and tolerant nation; and a united and proud nation (Presidential Task Group for Long Term Vision for Botswana, 1997). The vision incorporates the *botho* principle, which compels individuals and families to support and care for the needy out of moral obligation. This is because it is believed that those who are privileged at one point, may become vulnerable at another time, hence the need to support relatives, neighbours and community members. It is upon this premise that serving others is perceived as an investment for assistance in the future.

This article highlights the fact that volunteering is a growing phenomenon in Botswana. A range of issues and challenges have been identified, however, calling for policy review and redirection. This article traces the evolution and meaning of service in the context of changing national economic and social policies in Botswana. Service is also taking place in a changing global context. The contemporary human development situation in Botswana is outlined, followed by a discussion of the findings of the study with reference to four key issues: (a) service provision and dependency; (b) gender, social class, age and social values; (c) institutional factors; and (d) the structure of civic service programmes. Lastly, the implications of these issues and challenges for social development policies and programmes are considered.

This article is the result of a study on service and volunteering in Botswana, which was part of a larger Southern African study (Patel, Perold, Mohamed & Carapinha, 2007). A qualitative, cross-sectional study involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Rubin & Babbie, 2001) with key respondents from urban, peri-urban and rural areas was conducted. Official records and secondary data were reviewed and analysed. Respondents were purposefully sampled on the basis of their knowledge of, and experience in, volunteering in government, non-

governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs). Both the research sites and key informants were selected using convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques. There is currently a mushrooming of CBOs and FBOs that provide services in communities. A total of 15 key informants were interviewed. Two focus group discussions were held, comprising eight members each. The research team did not have prior in-depth knowledge of the scope and nature of civic service programmes in Botswana to inform the study design.

The evolution of service and volunteering in Botswana

Volunteering in Botswana has a long history dating back to the pre-colonial period. Under colonialism, the spirit of co-operation and reciprocity persisted and was enhanced, since the colonialists, in most cases, did not invest significant resources to develop African socio-economy, except where it was necessary in the promotion of European welfare. Thus, any social provision was based on indigenous inputs and religious enterprises, thereby making the services rudimentary. Following independence, many nationalist African governments, Botswana inclusive, were intent on changing the conditions of underdevelopment characteristic of colonialism. Governments began to search for new development paradigms in a bid to promote rapid economic growth and the nationalisation of the foreign-dominated private sector. In the case of Botswana, the government was successful in generating revenues which were subsequently invested in social development (Edge, 1998; Harvey & Lewis, 1990; Picard, 1987). The availability of resources led government to become the key player in social development. This feature negatively impacted on the spirit of volunteerism (Rankopo, 1996; Tsiane & Youngman, 1985) that had been a major characteristic of Tswana society before colonialism.

In the 1970s, however, all these development efforts came to a stop, as economies in many African countries experienced deep and pervasive crises, characterised by lack of growth, high rates of inflation, rising foreign and internal debts, high unemployment, shortages of basic goods, and crumbling infrastructure (Osei-Hwedie & Bar-On, 1999). These economic problems led to the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In light of the above, the voluntary sector was also re-invented and became the domain of organisations popularly known as non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and, more recently,

faith-based organisations. These organisations have become entrenched in the social development process of many African countries, including Botswana.

The concept of service and volunteering

Service and volunteerism are rooted in the culture and traditions of the people of Botswana. Thus, they are often conceptualised in cultural and religious terms and seen as an obligation to help those in need. The essence of volunteering is to promote humaneness (*botho/ubuntu*). Volunteerism, therefore, is influenced by the socio-economic, political and environmental factors within a society (Patel & Wilson, 2004; UNV, 2005; Voicu & Voicu, 2003). The term service, culturally understood as “*tirelo*”, implies something that is done for others or “*go thusa batho*” (to help people). In religious terms, it implies the spirit of servitude, expressed as “*go direla Modimo*” or “*thomo ya Modimo*”. Volunteering (*boithaopo*) refers to the act of helping other people without expecting payment. However, gifts of appreciation for investment of time and effort are acceptable. Thus, the terms service (*tirelo*) and volunteerism (*boithaopo*) are commonly used interchangeably. Service and volunteerism may be conceptualised differently, however, depending on the nature of the organisation and the service it offers, or on the orientation of the individual service providers.

Consistent with the writings of Thupayagale & Rampa (2005), service and volunteering have a social meaning and fulfil political, economic and religious obligations. Historically, individuals and communities operated with the spirit of togetherness and helped each other undertake a wide range of activities to satisfy a diversity of needs. The cultural meaning of service and volunteering is underscored by phrases such as “*moroto wa o esi ga o ele*”, “*mabogo dinku a thebana*” (working together for a common purpose), “*go direla setshaba*” (selflessness in community and national service), and “*boineelo*” (commitment and humility to serve). These concepts may take on a religious or cultural meaning depending on the nature of the service provider. Overall, modern volunteering and service appear to have borrowed from traditional principles of reciprocity and mutual aid such as “*mafisa*” (lending of cattle to the poor), and “*molaletsa*” (mutual self-help to enable people to be productive and self-reliant). All these recognise the dignity and worth of those who need support and care. For some people, volunteering is a means of avoiding idleness and being useful to others. It is evident from the data that those who have a history of volunteering in their communities are more likely to participate in the care-giving of people living with chronic diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

The human development context of service provision

Botswana is a multi-party constitutional democracy and has been ruled by the Botswana Democratic Party since its first elections were held in 1965. Botswana is a big territory with a very small population of 1,7 million people (Republic of Botswana, 2003). At independence, Botswana was among the world's poorest countries, but high economic growth rates have been sustained over the years and today Botswana is one of the wealthier countries in the region. This became possible because of the major role played by the state in socio-economic development (Edge, 1998). By 2001, 54,2 per cent of the population was living in urban areas, probably due to the availability of employment opportunities. Life expectancy at birth decreased from 65,3 years in 1991 to 55,7 years in 2001 mainly due to the effects of HIV/AIDS (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2001:11). According to the Botswana AIDS Impact Survey II (2004), the national HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is 17,1 per cent. In terms of economic performance, GDP rose from US\$7 820 in 2001 to US\$9 945 in 2004 (Human Development Report, 2004). In 2002/03, about 30 per cent of the total population were poor (CSO, 2003). Between 1990 and 2004 almost a quarter of the population (23,5 per cent) were living below US\$1 per day and 50,1 per cent below US\$2 per day (Human Development Report, 2004). The poverty scenario is not consistent with a country where high economic growth has been sustained over the years. The major human development challenges facing the country are poverty, unemployment and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

High economic performance leading to availability of resources has enabled the government to provide extensive social services to the population across the country. It must be noted that, in terms of wealth, Botswana is only third to Mauritius and South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa. Many social services such as education, health, housing and water are to some extent subsidised for certain sectors of the population by government. The country has made significant strides in achieving universal access to basic education and health care. Health services are within reasonable reach of communities for free or at very little cost. Bar-On (2002) notes that this goes against world trends and, especially, the force of economic structural adjustment ushered by neo-liberal ideology. Perhaps Botswana has been able to provide some subsidies and go against world trends because its Structural Adjustment Programme was self-induced; and it has the resources and the political will to do so.

Volunteerism in a changing policy environment

Delivering social development remains a challenge to many governments throughout the world. Current development paradigms emphasise the importance of involving ordinary people in decisions concerning their own development (Coetzee, 2001; Patel, 2005; Sewpaul & Holscher, 2004). The concept, development in the social sciences, is used to denote the evolution of countries, cultures and communities from less advanced to more advanced social stages (Fry & Martin, 1991). According to Edge (1998), Botswana's social policy changes are described as being close to a developmental state model, which emphasises (1) government's leading role in national development; (2) the existence of an authoritarian state in the way it controls state administration; (3) the control and mediation of workers' wage demands upon employers; (4) the expansion of social services and infrastructural development nationwide, and notable rates of economic growth over an extended period. Despite this, we note that Botswana also exhibits some characteristics of a neo-liberal state, which emphasises downsizing government, privatisation, residual service delivery and cost-sharing, among other things. Botswana also places emphasis on state-community partnerships such as in community-based care, and parents'/guardians' contribution to children's education in primary and secondary schools. This may be considered in the context of the social development approach. Thus, Botswana straddles different theoretical perspectives, with the developmental and neo-liberal perspectives taking prominence at different points in time.

The state, however, irrespective of the theoretical orientation, remains committed to community participation, mutual social responsibility, state-community partnerships and social justice. It maintains that individuals, families and communities must contribute towards national development efforts. This shift in development-policy thinking is mainly due to, among other things, economic changes and throwback to cultural dictates. The decline of agriculture due to droughts, rapid and sustained growth in the mining sector, and the HIV and AIDS epidemic, have compounded the problem. It is against this backdrop that service and volunteerism have, since the 1990s, assumed significant importance. Therefore, there has been a shift towards greater involvement of communities through state-community partnerships and cost sharing through payment for services where people are able to afford them, for example in education.

The Botswana state has, since independence, played a key role in the economy, which has seen rapid and sustained growth. Between 1965 and 1980, "it had the highest rate of GDP growth in the world at 14.2 per cent", and between 1980 and 1990, "the third-highest increase in the world at 9,9 per cent" (Edge, 1998:337).

This was consequently invested in social services throughout the country. The state controls development through national development plans which are approved by Parliament. All national development plans are guided by economic principles. One of these is social justice, which emphasises redistribution of goods and services. The state controls employee wages through the National Economic Manpower and Incomes Council. As explained above, Botswana has promoted universal access to education, health, water and housing, among other things. Vision 2016 also underscores this direction (Presidential Task Group for Long Term Vision for Botswana, 1997).

Discussion of findings

The voluntary landscape in Botswana comprises formal and informal organisations, and individuals and small groups involved in a variety of activities. Botswana has no compulsory civic service, having discontinued Tirelo Setshaba (TS) in 1999. Tirelo Setshaba was a national service scheme for secondary school leavers who served for one year anywhere in the country away from their homes, prior to entering tertiary institutions or starting full-time employment. The major service areas in the country are widespread, including human and social services, education, social and community development, child welfare, health including HIV/AIDS and spiritual healing, counselling, crime prevention and protection of property, emergency relief, gender, personal development, human rights, environmental protection, agricultural extension, sports and recreation, nutrition, social and financial security, and youth development. However, most of the services in the study are in the social welfare field.

Voluntary organisations in Botswana may be classified as formal and informal. While nearly all the different voluntary organisations exist across urban, rural and peri-urban areas, many of them are concentrated in urban areas and medium to large villages. A significant proportion of voluntary organisations are located in Gaborone, the capital city, with branches in other parts of the country. A unique finding is that Botswana has community-based organisations that do not have linkages to national levels. Many such CBOs are essentially extensions of public services such as, for example, village health committees, village development committees, and social welfare committees. Consequently, there is no national movement to guide their ideologies and activities. Generally, individuals may join an organisation of their choice subject to the specific membership requirements of each organisation. In this section, we discuss the key issues of the study, state-community partnerships, gender, class and age, institutional factors, and the structure of service and volunteering in Botswana.

State-community partnerships: Service provision and dependency

On the one hand, and consistent with a development approach, the government has continued efforts to provide basic standards of education, health care, and water supply, among other services. This provision of social services is consistent with the principle of social justice which guides national development planning. The concern is that as far as possible, there must be fair and equal access to resources and opportunities for advancement of individuals and communities. It is also the basis of the efforts to enhance economic opportunities for all citizens and the provision of safety net programmes such as drought relief, supplementary feeding, and the National Policy on Destitute Persons. However, government involvement in service provision has also resulted in dependency in that local people are not willing to volunteer. On the other hand, government has adopted policy which advocates state-community partnerships in service delivery. The central criticism is that state-community partnerships are limited as poor households and communities have to care for people at home and in the community instead of in the hospitals. This places enormous subjective and objective burdens on these communities and presents a tension for community-based care and partnerships.

Ethic of care: Gender, class and age

Study results suggest that most of the women providing service in home-based care were unemployed and had virtually no income. At best, they could generate income from the informal sector, which was hardly enough for their own upkeep. Consequently, the nature of their contribution revolved around psychosocial support involving practical activities such as bathing patients, cleaning, cooking and other household chores, and praying for the infected and affected. In most cases, therefore, they were less likely to provide financial and material resources (Rankopo et al., 2006). Despite this, it must be emphasised that well-educated middle-class women in Botswana are found to also volunteer in organisations and activities that attract some significant rewards such as high visibility (national recognition); financial incentives (allowances); social status (standing in society); networking (connections to national and international personalities, NGOs and business entities); and power (political and economic position). This is demonstrated, for instance, by women in organisations such as Emang Basadi, Metlhaetsile, Kagisano Society Women's Shelter Project, Bana ba Rona Trust, Women and Law in Southern Africa, and Ditshwanelo, through which some women have received exposure and significant benefits.

Thus, women were found to be over-represented in civic service primarily due to socialisation and gender role stereotypes, which emphasise an ethic of caring

and responsibility for others among females. In some service organisations, such as Childline and Botswana Network of People Living with AIDS (BONEPWA), young females, mainly university students, predominated as servers. These volunteers also lacked resources other than their skills and time. AIDS caregiving is perceived as “women’s work”, since it involves mainly household chores. Even in male-focused associations such as the True Men Sector in Botswana which focuses on HIV/AIDS, males do not volunteer in large numbers.

In Botswana, the belief is that, as heads or potential heads of households and primarily breadwinners, men must engage in gainful employment or activities that bring monetary or material returns. In situations where men volunteer in large numbers in Botswana, the activities are more likely to be associated with politics, religion, governing boards of associations, and organisations that give them visibility and provide prospects for future employment or career and social advancement (Rankopo et al., 2006). This is supported by Nataka (2006) in Uganda.

Generally, young people in Botswana, both males and females, are less inclined to volunteer. Rankopo et al. (2006) report that those who volunteer, do so with the hope of using the experience to find permanent employment or turning the voluntary position into a paid one. In other instances, some volunteers see the resources provided to facilitate their work as opportunities for improving their own welfare. For example, they may use transport provided for their own chores, take some of the food provided for the needy to their families at home, and use any monetary allowance for their personal needs. In addition, organisations are sometimes less inclined to provide opportunities for young people with fewer skills, and less education and knowledge to volunteer, as donors require superior skills in report-writing and accountability for their financial support. All these are supported by the literature (Flick et al., 2002; Nataka, 2006; Reisch & Wenocur, 1984; Voicu & Voicu, 2003; Volunteer Development Scotland, 2006).

Institutional factors

Service and volunteering in Botswana are influenced by institutional factors such as access to services and related relevant information. These are also affected by, but are not limited to, skills, experience, age, commitment and language. For example, some services need specialised training, and local volunteers who understand the language and culture of beneficiaries. Age is also a factor in most organisations. For example, in the village development committee (VDC), one has to be 18 years and above; be literate (know how to read and write); be resident in the locality; and be conversant in both Setswana and English. This is because servers have to be mature and able to keep records. Organisations which provide formal services need

educated people with professional knowledge and skills. That is why organisations like Childline recruit servers who are professionals, such as social workers, nurses and psychologists.

However, organisations associated with community HIV/AIDS intervention usually welcome “anyone” who can help with psychosocial support such as medication adherence support, and the establishment and maintenance of backyard gardens. Such organisations include the Community Relief Day Care Centre, Botswana Network of People Living with AIDS (BONEPWA), Tirisanyo Catholic Commission, and the Shelter for the Hopeful Community, who have no set criteria to determine who can serve. However, for burial societies, the emphasis is on adults who have the ability to pay the subscription fee. In all these organisations, commitment is a core factor that drives the recruitment of servers. Since these are community initiatives, servers have to be committed to effectively meeting the needs of their clients – orphans, senior citizens and others receiving home-based care. However, for faith-based organisations, selection of servers is on the basis of their Christianity. Based on the above, it is evident that the criteria according to which servers are selected have the effect of leaving out certain capable individuals, on the basis of educational level, faith, professional skill or age. Where professional training and skills gained through formal training are emphasised, those without them, irrespective of what experiences and resources they can bring to the service, cannot serve.

Structure of service: Semi-formalisation of informal service provision

Volunteer programmes in Botswana are formal, quasi-formal or informal. Formal voluntary organisations must register with the Registrar of Societies and submit annual returns on their programmes. Informal volunteer programmes involve individuals providing specific services at their own time to assist individuals and organisations in a defined area. Quasi-formal voluntary programmes involve public service-community partnerships in a wide range of areas such as home-based care. Generally, there have been no overt efforts to fully institutionalise the informal services. Instead, there appears to be semi-institutionalisation which is actually an incorporation of the informal into the formal service provision. For example, in home-based care, while doctors, nurses, social workers and health educators form the formal professional care team, the actual care is provided by family (and by the mother or sister in particular) and community members (Phorano & Modie Moroka, 2003; Sebego, 2003). Even in the case of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs), patients are required to have an informal support base to ensure that they take the medication as prescribed. In this case, the informal care system is seen as an extension of the

formal system, where possible. This model is seemingly top-down and the informal is subtly subsumed under the formal. The decision-making process is controlled by the formal structures, and decisions are handed down to the grassroots for implementation.

Implications for service, policy and programmes

The concept of volunteering in Botswana influences the nature and level of involvement of people in service and volunteering. Conceptions of service and volunteering reflect elements of both tradition and modernity, and provide a context that enables the involvement of a large number of actors across diverse service areas. Volunteering is defined in the context of individuals providing services without expectation of reward. Both males and females, young and old may become servers. This section discusses the implications of state-community partnerships, gender, class and age, institutional factors, and structure of volunteer programmes on service, policy and programmes.

State-community partnerships

Botswana's development philosophy supports state-community partnerships in social development. Volunteerism must be defined in policy terms as all actions or activities that are carried out willingly and freely in the hope of helping others. This makes the concept of free will central to the idea of volunteering. Botswana has provided a policy framework whereby the formal and informal interface work as one complete system, instead of the traditional divisions of formal versus informal. What emerges is that because of their unique characteristics as opposed to the formal dominating the informal, ways must be found to balance both systems and make them complementary. While this is consistent with current development paradigms, there is need for smart partnerships between the state and the community, the private sector and civil society. We note that a number of actors in the private sector have corporate social responsibility programmes, and continue to urge the government to introduce tax rebates in recognition of such efforts. Such a policy direction will attract more businesses to contribute towards voluntary programmes in the country. A major limitation of Botswana's development policy is that it has shifted the burden of care to individuals, families and communities.

Ethics of care: Gender, class, and age

It is evident that the majority of volunteers in Botswana are low-income and illiterate older women. The fact that informal service provision has been semi-formalised has not helped the majority of women fulfilling social obligations of service provision in community-based programmes. This necessitates rethinking community-based interventions which have more or less increased the burden of care on women without any extra resources for their own upkeep. There is also a need to promote gender sensitivity in volunteering. Greater efforts should be made to motivate men, youth and upper social classes to give freely of their expertise and labour. This is especially important to ensure that women are not unduly exploited by formal service and policy prescriptions.

Institutional factors and structure of programmes

Several factors are known to motivate volunteering. Individual factors such as age, education, marital status, occupation, level of motivation, and values, beliefs and attitudes influence a person's motivation and willingness to volunteer. Certain organisations in Botswana exclude younger people because they lack maturity, skills and experience. Some of these factors are imposed by international donors who have high standards of accountability. Noble as they may seem, such factors deny many young and illiterate people the opportunity to serve. Some voluntary programmes are highly structured or formalised, requiring superior management skills but with inadequate supportive structures to supervise volunteers. There is need for flexibility, adequate support and the establishment of training programmes to prepare all those interested in volunteering. Thus, Botswana should cultivate political and policy environments that are sympathetic to the voluntary sector; provide an atmosphere that enables individuals to give of themselves freely and willingly; facilitate the work of NGOs and CBOs to the extent that they can source resources without undue restrictions; and design and implement legitimate programmes and undertake activities without political interference. These ideas are supported by Anheier & Salamon (1999), Seppala (2002) and the Institute for Volunteer Research (2006).

Conclusion

Botswana have a long history of volunteerism and collective action, which is based on notions of communalism as well as modernity. Service and volunteering are conceptualised, in cultural and religious terms, as an obligation to help those

in need. Overall, service and volunteerism have become key factors in social development in Botswana due to economic changes and other complex social conditions such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Botswana's approach to volunteerism is underscored by state-community partnerships in addressing socio-economic development and the engagement of individuals and communities in providing services that have generally been the domain of the state. These have also led to the semi-formalisation, and the feminisation of service provision at the community level, further perpetuating the disadvantaged position of women. These and other issues underlying the promotion of service and volunteerism in Botswana call for review and redirection. While involvement of communities in social development is necessary, the state should not overburden its citizens. We believe that the state has a major role to play in social development, from developing favourable social policies to funding the voluntary sector. In addition, the state should introduce tax rebates to promote private-sector funding for the voluntary sector.

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Endnotes

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