Historical Lessons for Rural Development in Botswana: Recollections on the Bamangwato Development Association, 1960s and Early 1970s

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Until the very last years of the colonial period there were no Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Botswana, certainly none as we know them today. There were the Wayfarers and the Pathfinders, later transformed into the Scouts and Guides, and the mission institutions, the hospitals at Mochudi, Molepolole, Kanye and Ramotswa (although this was very small), the few clinics and the secondary schools at Kgale; and Moeding and Francistown –both of which were established only in the early 1960s.

This old pattern was broken by the forging of an entirely new kind of understanding and partnership between two very remarkable individuals, Tshekedi Khama, Bangwato Regent and Guy Clutton Brock, a United Kingdom citizen, agronomist, Quaker and crusading idealist who was resident and working in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). These two had first met in July 1958 when Tshekedi visited Clutton Brock's famous St Faith's project in Rhodesia. Both were convinced that change was desperately needed in Southern Africa and both were keen to bring this about by initiating new kinds of development projects.

The outcome of that shared ideal was the establishment of the Bamangwato Development Association (BDA), probably in 1960, at Radisele. To suggest that the beginnings of the modern history of NGOs is to be found at Radisele is a bit like claiming that developments of this magnitude could occur at places such as Khakhea or Molapowabojang in Botswana. The simple answer is that, in normal circumstances, they couldn't because external development initiatives were allowed to take place only in the tribal capitals where everything would be very much under the control of this or the area's *kgosi* (chief). The establishment of the BDA at Radisele, therefore, was a one off which could happen only because of the unusual political situation in Serowe. After Tshekedi had lost the support of the Bangwato during the Seretse-Ruth marriage crisis (1948-1956) and ceased to be Regent, he settled, with some of his followers, at Pilikwe. When it came to identifying a base for the development initiative he jointly conceived with Clutton Brock, it was obvious that he should make his *tshimo* (field) at Radisele available for this purpose, not least because, unlike Pilikwe, it was handily on the line of rail.

The Bamangwato Development Association I

What happened next takes us outside the realm of the publicly available record because information about the BDA is almost non-existent. I am, therefore, grateful to Vernon Gibberd, who succeeded Arthur Stanley as manager of the BDA, for providing information which would be otherwise unavailable. Vernon has kindly commented on the BDA as follows:

'In January 1959 the white Rhodesian government declared a state of emergency and Guy Clutton Brock was arrested. He was released after a few months on condition that he left Rhodesia and stayed here, in the old Protectorate. So he and his wife, Molly, left Rhodesia and stayed with Tshekedi and [his wife] Ella at Pilikwe. In 1959 Tshekedi died and in the following year the BDA was started because Ella was a real live wire and was very active in keeping her late husband's vision alive and moving. Guy became the de facto manager.

In perhaps 1961, an English volunteer, Bill Taylor, joined the Clutton Brocks and with Wendy Flintoff, also from England, got the BDA Store at Radisele soundly established. The two of them then moved to Serowe where they helped Ruth [Seretse Khama's wife] in establishing the Lady Khama Community

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Centre. Very soon after these two had left Radisele another couple, a British Engineer and his social worker wife, Arthur and Deirdre Stanley and their baby son arrived to oversee the general development of the BDA. Within a short time, Clutton Brock was able to borrow an agricultural economist, Peter Stutley, from the Ministry of Agriculture in Basutoland [Lesotho] to advise the BDA on its future plans. Stutley's report was sympathetic and thorough and became a sort of bible for the BDA during the next few years. Stutley made a follow-up visit in 1966 when he offered further excellent advice.

The BDA store in Radisele was extremely important. The St Faith's project in Rhodesia also had a store and its profits funded a great deal of the farm's development work. It was intended, therefore, to use St Faith's as a model and to replicate in Radisele what had been so successfully achieved there. The new BDA store would also, it was hoped, generate sufficient profits to support the BDA's agricultural and social development projects. And make profit it did for the first few years, mainly because it was so well managed by Arthur Stanley and Diphimotswe Koloi. But getting the store started was a struggle in itself because the Licensing Committee was made up of the District Commissioner and the local General Dealers who believed that approving new General Dealers Licences could only be at their expense. In the event, Guy must have used his undoubted charm and persuasive gifts to convince the District Commissioner that he should over-rule the traders.

Over the years, the BDA added a Postal Agency with post coming from and being despatched to Palapye twice a week by the mixed goods train. It meant one of the BDA staff, usually Wabobedi, had to cycle up to the siding about a kilometre away and wait for the train. The inncoming post arrived at 19.30hrs if the train was punctual, but the outgoing train came to Radisele only at 00.30hrs! We, of course, cashed cattle cheques for people and we "hosted" the Standard Bank Mobile Agency twice a week as well. Then we persuaded the Rhodesia Railways to put in a cattle loading facility at the siding so that people no longer had to drive their cattle all the way to Mahalapye. At about the same time, we moved the corrugated iron grain silos from the farm to the store so that we could be grain wholesalers. In those days, there was an occasional surplus of sorghum (not very often, I must say!) so that the BDA was able to use a small revolving loan fund to buy surplus grain. This fund was created by using a a cash donation from the African Development Trust in London when 18 tons had been bought -enough to fill a short railway truck- a sample was sent to agents Kahn & Kahn in Johannesburg for them to quote a price. They always paid well if it was *traditional Tswana corn* -which it was in those days.

As the 1960s progressed and the drought deepened, we reversed the process and used the fund to buy a railway truckload of sorghum, store it in the grain tanks at the shop and then sell it at a reasonable mark-up to customers whose crops had failed. At the farm, every Saturday morning, Jimmy Mosotho harnessed one of the old second-hand power-paraffin tractors to a grinding mill so that people could bring their *mabele* [sorghum] to be ground (or, perhaps more often, their malt, for making beer -something which happened on many weekends judging by our memories of the drumming and accordion music we used to hear on Saturday nights).

Yes, the store did make steady profits which was not so surprising because the nearest comparably-stocked store was in Palapye, forty kilometers away or Vos's store, nearer by in Pilikwe, which was still some twenty five kilometers off.'

Figure 1: Vernon Gibberd

Source: Sandy Grant's collection

The Bamangwato Development Association II

Vernon Gibberd continues his recollections of the country's first modern NGO:

'Arthur and Deirdre Stanley had left the BDA in 1964 when Arthur's contract with the Africa Development Trust came to an end. Before they left – in their last year – Arthur had overseen the development of the new Sebeso School in Palapye and the building of a range of new classrooms for Pilikwe School using UNESCO coupons forwarded by the Africa Development Trust. Arthur went on to become the principal of the Vocational Training Centre in Gaborone and a senior civil servant.

Within a year or so, I think in 1966-7 or so of appointing a more professional manager, the poor old BDA had become financially embarrassed. A total of R9,000 was out on recorded credit sales to over a hundred people, some very rich, others as poor as church mice. We managed to get about two thirds of this money back and then adopted a strictly no credit policy which was a great deal more sensible. Many people said that this would hurt the poor whom BDA was supposed to be helping, but it didn't seem a very logical view and, in the event, the poor paid cash like everyone else.

One other thing that the BDA store did was to provide a water point for people. In 1964 the [Bechuanaland Protectorate] government had drilled a borehole for the BDA some distance away in the hills. In 1964 the BDA equipped this borehole using funds donated by the British organization, Freedom from Hunger, and carried the water the four miles down to the store under both the railway and the main road. What was significant, though, was that the store *sold* the water. I forget the price – perhaps 25 cents a drum or 5 cents a person (18 litres) –but people had to pay at a time when water was normally provided

them free of charge. Water was also sold at the BDA farm –to which I now turn.

Guy Clutton Brock, being an agronomist, was much more concerned about farming than about retail trading, and was always keen that the various BDA projects should produce as much food as possible. With this aim in mind, the Pilikwe Kgotla granted the Association 200 acres of land at Radisele, about two miles from the main road and about twelve miles from Pilikwe. Having set aside this land for the BDA, the kgotla asked everyone to come and cut the poles needed [to] fence it, to plough the land and to construct some rondavels and farm buildings. With the Department of Agriculture in Mahalapye providing seeds and phosphate fertilizer, arable farming began. A farm manager, Residual Montshiwa was recruited together with a foreman, Dingongorego Magoma and a team of about 10 workers. The latter were all paid a typical farm wage – about 25 cents a day. Meanwhile, additional funding had been secured from Oxfam to buy wire, pay wages, buy draft oxen (the BDA had a fine team of 20 trained oxen) and cover transport and minor admin costs. This assistance was channeled to the BDA through the African Development Trust in London which was an off shoot of the famous Africa Bureau with which Tshekedi had long had a close working relationship.

The nearest phone and post office were in Palapye so the BDA vehicle, an old second hand Series 1 Landrover pick-up, had a great deal of use. Fortunately, the Northern Ireland branch of War on Want sent a couple of second-hand Ferguson power paraffin tractors to help with tillage because by then a new series of droughts was hitting the BP [Bechuanalanad Protectorate] and the oxen at the beginning of the season were too weak to plough.

After three years working at the BDA I felt that I had learnt a lot about local conditions, and about day to day practicalities. I had also helped introduce new crops such as cotton, groundnuts, Turkish tobacco (not a strong enough smoke for local taste), and innovations such as silage making, supplementary feeding of cattle for slaughter and, of course, managed fenced grazing. A bit of home leave and then, on the return trip, a visit to Kordofan in Sudan to look at a UNDP project that pioneered a novel form of rain water conservation in a sandy area. At that stage, the Africa Development Trust had been subsumed into the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) with different people in charge of it (of whom one was Fritz Schumacher) and with a broader remit. So from late 1966, the BDA farm gave annual crop production *per se* a lower priority, but more effort went into water management and, in 1967, a farm training scheme for primary school leavers.

I made my first Kordofan-model hafir that year and, after a false start when the first rain gave such energetic run-off that it filled in ten minutes and washed the lining structure in with it, had my first 10,000 gallons (2,200 cubic metres) of run-off stored and then set up a small vegetable patch beside it. This was irrigated from an oil drum which was filled by a hand-pump from the hafir. Water was then released to be distributed over the plot through pieces of cheap perforated polythene pipe. This initial success stimulated Oxfam's interest and this, together with the ITDG, devised a two-year project which would introduce the idea to a cluster of primary schools in what had then become the Central District [of independent Botswana]. The teachers (trained by me in a two-week holiday course at BDA) and the kids did all the hard work and then enjoyed the vegetables grown with the saved water. An English IVS [International Voluntary Service] volunteer, Paul Moody spent a year with us at the BDA helping with the hafir project and it was he who ensured that it was all well written up at the end. His report was one of the ITDG's first publications: "The Introduction of Rainwater Catchment Tanks to Botswana".

Meanwhile, I tested other materials for lining hafirs and established different types of vegetable production so that BDA Farm became a bit of a Research base for micro-irrigation and rainwater harvesting before these became fashionable. Ten primary school leaver boys were also brought onto the farm to begin a two-year training in basic practical farming. This was only a few months before the launch of the much more ambitious but basically similar Serowe Farmers Brigade to which I moved as its second manager in

January 1969, after just over five years at BDA.

Hafir is an Arabic word meaning an excavation designed to store run-off from rainfall below ground level (as opposed to a dam which *impounds* run-off water on the land surface). It is usually constructed where soils are deep and impervious, but if the hole is lined with a waterproof membrane, they can be used anywhere with a deep enough soil profile to allow the excavation and where there is run-off to fill it. i.e. not in the Kgalagadi!

Figure 2: Vernon Gibberd at work

Source: Sandy Grant's collection

The Bamangwato Development Association III

In this third and last installment, Vernon Gibberd continues his recollections of the Bamangwato Development Association, the country's first modern NGO. As an addition, Trevor Bottomley, at the time the first Registrar of Cooperatives explains how he came to be involved with the BDA

Recollection by Vernon Gibberd

'With Oxfam money coming through again, another major Stutley recommendation could be started, namely a fenced ranch at Makoro, three miles to the north of Radisele. Land for this project had been set aside by the kgotla – about 4,000 acres – and this constituted a major departure for Tribal Land management. Fencing of *masimo* [fields] was allowed, but not the fencing of grazing land. All grazing land was for communal use and, as far as I know, the only other fenced grazing in the Ngwato Area at that time was the pasture research station at Morale and the Leupane Bull Camp run by the Tribal Council. This was the first commercial fenced ranching in Central District. Cattle were bought and either kept for breeding or else grown out and sold direct to the Lobatse Abattoir. There was some supplementary feeding done in winter to improve weights and grades at slaughter using silage made from fodder sorghum and milled crop stover

enriched with urea and molasses. A few cows were milked and milk provided to the small voluntary school that my wife, Tineke, and the wife of Rasiduelo, Dikeledi, had started in 1967.

I recall no real resistance to the Ranch, and this was perhaps surprising as the ranch closed off a large area of grazing to local people. I think perhaps the kgotla at that time had more authority than it does today, perhaps also people saw that, when BDA bought cattle with which to stock it, they got better prices as we first used a scale and then related the price to current abattoir prices. This, incidentally, is what caught the interest and the imagination of the newly appointed first ever Registrar of Co-operatives, Trevor Bottomley. One of his earliest goals was to reduce the role of the cattle speculator in the cattle business and to this end, he fast-tracked the formation and registration of the country's first cattle co-op. This was modelled to some extent on the BDA's ranch at Makoro, and an English volunteer, Bernard Le Bargy, was initially stationed at the BDA's farm to help get it going.

Other expatriates came and went during those years of whom perhaps the most famous was the author, Bessie Head. She came to stay for some months as a refugee from South Africa with her young son, Howard, when she had nowhere else to stay. She was my tobacco smoke taste panel, as well as writing her first mainstream novel "When Rain Clouds Gather", based loosely on her time at the BDA farm and partly on her time in Serowe, Botswana".

Throughout all this time, the governance of the BDA had gradually evolved from the Pilikwe Kgotla, to a committee of local people all of whom were involved with cattle and farming. The subordinate African Authorities of Palapye and Mahalapye were also drawn in, but to my knowledge, no one ever decided who actually *owned* the BDA. Was it a co-op? If so, who were the members? Was it a Local Authority business? If so, which local authority? And could a kgotla own a business? Or could a subordinate African Authority own a business? It was an Association, yes, but an association of whom? The purpose was pretty clear, but the ownership and where "the buck stopped" never was. In 1966 the Serowe District Commissioner, Eustace Clark, made a concerted attempt to formalise the governance of the Association by establishing a Board of Governors with a legally binding Constitution and membership drawn from the great and the good across the whole country. But with the end of my second contract at the end of 1968 and the parent body in London – now called the Intermediate Technology Development Group – moving on to other fields of activity, the BDA was left adrift but with a viable trading business, a range of farm equipment which was increasingly being used to provide a contract ploughing service to lands in the area, a viable ranching business and a hinterland where development was now beginning to take off. But even today, I wonder who can claim to be responsible for whatever is left there?'

Recollection by Trevor Bottomley continues

'As I recall it, my first memory of the BDA was when I was taken to Radisele by Phalatswe Tshoagong whom I had just appointed as an Assistant Co-op Officer to work in that area - he had been a school teacher at Pilikwe. Phalatswe was much impressed by Vernon Gibberd and persuaded me that Radisele was the obvious place for the initial headquarters of the proposed Ngwato cattle marketing Co-op which project had been recommended to me for quick action by Patrick van Rensburg. Phalatswe thought that the BDA could, to everybody's advantage, be merged into a Co-op structure. Initially, however, there was some tension between Vernon and myself as there was soon afterwards between myself and Guy Clutton Brock who arrived for a visit soon after. The reason undoubtedly was that I thought that whilst these likeable people were obviously competent in respect of agriculture and farming, they had little sense of "business" and were indeed antipathetic to "profitable" business, so that potentially useful partners had to be kept a bit at arms length. It was because of this tension that I decided to post Bernard Le Bargy, a qualified accountant, to Radisele to work with Phalatswe and to keep his eye on the "profits". I believe that long, discursive hours with Bernard and Phalatswe sitting around evening fires at Radisele helped Vernon to

appreciate that I wasn't just another unhelpful government functionary and that a helpful partnership could be forged between us'.

Sandy Grant's account of Bamangwato Development Association

The BDA was the first modern NGO development project in this country. Starting in 1960, it pre-dated the only other major pre-independence development initiatives - van Rensburg's 1962 Swaneng and Mochudi's 1964 Community Centre. It also pre-dated the government's current backyard gardening project proposals by about 50 years. Development initiatives are always on the move, new ideas emerge, old ideas are re-cycled in new form and, most commonly of all, earlier initiatives, long forgotten, are endlessly repeated, often with precisely the same mistakes being made.

To suggest that this country's development NGOs have had their beginnings in a place such as Pilikwe may today seem absurd. More reasonably, it might be suggested, the beginning must surely have occurred in Serowe or Francistown or even Molepolole? But all initiatives need an architect who, in this case, was Tshekedi Khama. After the upheavals resulting from Seretse's marriage to Ruth, Tshekedi left Serowe and in 1952 settled in Pilikwe. There he came to know the charismatic British Quaker, Guy Clutton Brock who was pioneering multi-racial, multi-faceted community development projects in Rhodesia. When Clutton Brock was deported from Rhodesia, Tshekedi invited him to establish something similar in Pilikwe. But when Tshekedi died in 1959 and it was left to his strong willed widow, Ella, to follow through with Clutton Brock the interests that had brought him and her husband together. The result was remarkable. Led by successive volunteer managers from the UK, the most notable being the late Arthur Stanley and Vernon Gibberd, the BDA, within its relatively small hinterland, transformed farming and the local economy. It purchased crops from the farmer which it sold in bulk to Johannesburg. With the onset of the terrible 60s drought, it reversed that process by importing much needed food stuffs instead of exporting them, which it then sold in its store. It experimented with water storage techniques. It was, in sum a brilliant development initiative where many threads were brought together with the involvement of the most outstanding British social activists of their day, the Clutton Brocks, Rev Michael Scott, John Raven, and Peter Kuenstler. Could it have been a coincidence that for five months in 1966 Bessie Head should have stayed there working as a volunteer help?

But somewhere along the line, as invariably happens, the project faltered, lost energy and impetus and died. Today, I assume that the physical remains of that amazing project are still much as we found them when we went to have a look six years ago. Decrepit and derelict of course – given the passage of time – but essentially still intact – so much so, that the correspondence and reports of the 1960s were still piled up on the floor of the old office, and gently blowing around in the wind. Surprisingly the buildings' fixtures, the doors and window frames, had not been harvested as normally occurs when anything of value is left unguarded, sometimes for even a minimal amount of time. In this instance, the local community had left the old BDA buildings un-violated and un-vandalised.

Elsewhere it is a norm, as in the abandoned Morwa forestry plantation that the door and window frames of all the old buildings would be routinely removed. But as at 2005, and very probably still today, this had not happened with the old BDA buildings. They had been left much as they were, the inevitable deterioration in the state of the buildings being due to nature rather than man. This is very remarkable. And it can happen only rarely anywhere in the world. Everywhere, man in need, feeds on the pickings available –broken down cars lose their wheels overnight, damaged buildings are stripped of their corrugated iron, newly installed fencing disappears, and unused buildings without security guards provide rewarding pickings for those who have the time to pick.

Somehow, the old BDA has contrived to be the exception to that norm. It is possible that its buildings have been taken apart in the years since I was last there – but I would be most surprised if this

has happened. If they were left inviolate in the years between its collapse, whenever that finally happened, and 2005, I assume that they would have been left inviolate since then.

But why? What might explain this individual reluctance to pillage?

There must be two possible explanations. One is that the old BDA was so strongly rooted in the community that no individual, even today, is willing to loot what all know is community property. The second reason is that there appears to be an ever on-going struggle as to which particular community is rightfully the heir of the old BDA. Does it belong to Pilikwe, or to Radisele? And when this issue is eventually settled, what then? What will either community do with the old place? And what can be learnt from other similar initiatives? Are formulas available? Both the earlier concepts of 'community development' and 'rural development' have lost appeal and it is now difficult to know what valid new concept has replaced them. Nevertheless, if the old project is ever to be re-created, the new pioneers may need to investigate what happened to the two other projects which broadly shared the BDA's objectives, the Mochudi Community Centre in the four years between 1964 and 1968 and the Bamalete Development Association project in Mogobane. The first of those two projects was closest to the Clutton Brocks's community development idyll even though he himself had no involvement in it. The Bamalete project in Mogobane, on the other hand, was more closely related to his commitment to improving community farming.

The early Mochudi initiative which had been grounded in the pioneering views emanating from London in the early 1960s was afterwards transformed by different views originating from the south – from Patrick van Rensburg in Serowe. These new ideas replaced a broad-based community development initiative with one which was entirely centred on one age group.

In contrast to the BDA whose best years pre-dated the availability of easy money, the Bamalete Association farming project at Mogobane, complete with a wonderful dam, was probably killed off, bit by bit, by an excess of aid, and by confused policy objectives and by straight forward bad management. Vernon Gibberd, who spent time at Mogobane as well as at the BDA suggests that Frank Taylor's National Research Institute Report which is now virtually impossible to obtain, is by far and away the best explanation of the continuing woes at Mogobane. Seemingly, however, there are no reports as to what went wrong at the BDA or what was achieved in Mochudi in its pre-Brigade years.

It seems strange to me that the government should have launched its backyard gardening project before it tried to find out what could be learnt from those three very important earlier initiatives. At their best, all three projects were huge successes according to their original objectives. Today, two, the BDA in Pilikwe and the BDA in Mogobane are derelict and abandoned whist the old Community Centre/Brigades in Mochudi seems to be primed for demolition and re-development.

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