

CHAPTER 2

MOBILISATION OF THE COMMUNITY ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

This chapter discusses how communities can be mobilised to manage their environment. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the key terms *community mobilisation, involvement and participation*. It is very important for the public to understand the conceptual basis of these terms since they are value loaded. Sometimes they are used interchangeably by both scholars and practitioners, thereby making it difficult for one to understand their differences and similarities.

The chapter also reflects on the ongoing efforts by various actors geared towards *better use, protection and conservation of the environment*. The chapter observes that it is through extensive dialogue that we can appreciate the significance of community mobilisation in environmental management. It must be understood that community mobilisation as a model is generally easier said than done. The challenge is to find better ways of making community mobilisation in environmental management an achievable goal.

Background

Traditional Tswana Societies

For many years, Botswana have maintained a living balance with their natural environment and resources on which they depend. They maintained an intimate organic relationship with nature, characterised by a high degree of sensitivity and respect for the workings of natural ecosystems and a sense of duty to conservation. Controls and taboo systems were a manifestation of this sense of close relatedness between Botswana and their surroundings. It is true, therefore, that a thorough understanding of nature leads to a sensible and sustainable attitude towards the use of its resources.

Post-Independence Tswana societies

Development as manifested in rapid economic growth and expansionist tendencies disturbed this harmonious relationship between Tswana tribal people and nature by imposing ever-increasing demands on natural resources. It introduced large scale industries, agriculture and began massive deforestation to construct roads and dams. Intensive mining operations began too, as “western notion of development” ushered Botswana into an era of resource-intensive use. The cumulative effect of land misuse, deforestation, pollution and desertification has resulted in extensive damage to the environment.

The ecological degradation that followed “development” has had a devastating effect on both rural and urban dwellers in Botswana. The most acute environmental problems facing this country are *overgrazing* (due to increased commercialisation of both arable and pastoral agriculture) and *pollution* (due to increased industrialisation and population growth).

The problems outlined above are continuing to grow. Hence, the need to be creative, imaginative and come up with effective strategies to address them. There is a growing concern at both national and local levels about the deteriorating environmental conditions. To remedy the situation and put Botswana back on the path to sound environmental management, sensitivity and recovery, most efforts should centre around mobilisation of the community in managing their own environment. It is no exaggeration to say that the struggle against all environmental problems as stated above will be won and lost at household, community and council level.

Community: Definitional Issues

There is no universal definition of the term “community”. Some commentators have used the term to refer to pre-industrial societies when there existed *strong kinship bonds and a spirit of communalism or communitarianism*. The term has also been used to refer to people living within specific geographical boundaries. Clarke (1975) traces the evolution of the definition community as including among others, *community as locality, as a social activity and as consisting of interest groups with different missions and sometimes conflicting agenda*.

Today, it is apparent that talk about community is an acknowledgement of the negative impact of industrialisation on social relationships in society.

The term community in this chapter shall refer to:

A group of individuals who have a consciousness of common social problems or interests, and a commitment to address these commonalities collectively (Rankopo, 1993: 34-35)

This definition of community places emphasis on the social factor or boundaries in the determination of a community. It is envisaged that this definition could be relevant for understanding and managing the environment, for communities are located within certain environments which they must protect and conserve.

Community Involvement, Participation and Mobilisation

As indicated earlier, these terms are often used interchangeably. A commonly held view is that for communities to participate in any social activity, they must

be mobilised, i.e., be organised, get involved and by so doing take part in social development efforts. Used in this manner, it is presumed that people will have a natural desire to take part in activities that they identify with and directly affect them.

Community involvement

This concept implies a sense of commitment on the part of a community. For a community to be involved means that *“the people will have a right and duty to participate actively in decisions concerned with solutions of their problems, and they would have greater responsibilities in assessing the needs, mobilising resources, and suggesting new solutions as well as creating and maintaining local organisations”* (Oakely and Marsden, 1986:19). Critics, however, argue that the word “involve” can note that it is the state which has the authority to involve people in social development. It is important to note that the state is a very powerful institution which determines when and under what conditions should ordinary people be involved in social development.

Community Participation

This concept means to *“sensitise people and thus to increase their receptivity and ability to respond to local development programmes, as well as to encourage local initiatives”* (Uma Lele, 1975). It is argued further that participation is “essentially a political act” in which the people voluntarily contribute to one or more public programmes designed to contribute to national development. However, they are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or to criticise its content (Oakely 1980:10; Oakely and Marsden, 1986:19).

Community Mobilisation

GoB/UNICEF (1989:226) define social mobilisation as *“increasing the capacity of individuals and communities to identify, evaluate and respond to their problems and opportunities within their own capacity and to seek assistance from elsewhere when necessary”*. Today, it is generally believed that community mobilisation is one of the most effective mechanisms of changing people’s behaviour and creating sensitivity to community issues. The adoption of this orientation may lead to the creation of environmental programmes which are more “appealing” or “acceptable” to the people.

It is also important to note that in the same vein, community mobilisation presupposes that local people and their leaders, and organisations are so weak

that they cannot on their own partake in local social development activities without external motivation. Consequently, there is a need for external agents to stimulate and motivate local people to participate in environmental programmes and projects. It is at this point that professionals will assume the roles of catalysts, educators and organisers. The major limitation of this model is that it emphasises the weakness and not strength of the community.

An important thing to note is that in seeking to mobilise the community one should not lose sight of the dynamics that may prevent the community from achieving their goals. These may include unscrupulous politicians taking advantage of the mobilisation process to promote their political agenda or for political expediency. This is dangerous as it is short term and it is likely to bring tension among people as they realise that they are being taken for a ride. Such dynamics, if left unchecked, could undermine even the best of intentions.

Current Efforts By Government

The government of Botswana, through different ministries is trying to confront the above problems head-on. Ministries involved include the Ministry of Education - Health Education Unit, Ministry of Health - Environmental Health Unit and Ministry of Local Government Lands and Housing - National Conservation Strategy Agency (NCSA). The latter plays a pivotal role as it is charged with the overall responsibility for policy, research, education and co-ordinating in an integrated manner the activities of other government ministries, departments concerned and to some extent NGOs focusing on environmental issues. Major activities include management and disposal of solid wastes, pollutants, littering, environmental education, research and policy formulation.

Despite government efforts, environmental problems continue unabated. The government also embraced the notion of community mobilisation in implementing its programmes but given the nature of its bureaucracy, the concept has not worked. Many explanations have been given for this unfortunate state of affairs, the most plausible one being the centralised or top-down nature of government programmes. The Botswana Government always wants to retain the power and responsibilities for formulation, planning and implementation at central level, treating communities as grateful beneficiaries and recipients rather than participants. This phenomenon may be termed paternalistic fallacy.

Limitations of Government Centralised Approaches

While a centralised bureaucratic approach may be appropriate for provision of national level enabling structures and strengthening of national level institutions,

it is certainly not suitable for selecting and implementing environmental projects and activities at village or community level. If a village level environmental project, e.g., littering campaign is spearheaded and determined by government (central or local) rather than communities themselves, there is a high possibility that the community will not identify with the project. This brings into the surface a fundamental question of ownership in that communities tend to perceive such projects as having been imposed from outside. They may consequently be indifferent, less committed, make less efforts, generally participate less, and in some cases, might even concentrate their efforts on criticising the government's efforts or become resigned to dependency on government provision.

The gap between planning and implementation has also been a major limitation. Government programmes are often said to be in the pipeline and many times communities have been asking, just how long is the pipeline as it takes a long time to implement programmes. For example, current efforts by government, NGOs and private sector on controlling litter have failed not because people were unwilling but because of government failure to provide dustbins in public places and where provided, failure to collect and empty them. This obviously kills the morale of the community resulting in indiscriminate disposal of litter.

Forstering Community Participation

Given the concerns over poor performance of current strategies, there have been calls to revive the old or come up with new strategies and initiatives on how best communities could manage their own environment. Today, it is often argued that emphasis must be placed on what Ul Hag (1976) would refer to as *“building of developments around people rather than people around development”*.

Mobilising the community to participate in managing the environment means ensuring that the people are able to act in ways that improve their own surroundings; in ways that will help not only to preserve but to enhance its future use. It means ensuring that policies and practices are in place to provide Botswana with a healthy environment at home, school, work or wherever they may be. Mobilising people and encouraging community participation also means helping people to assert control over the factors which affect their environment. We must equip and enable people to act in ways that preserve, improve and manage the environment. By creating a climate that favours community participation, we can channel the energy, skills and creativity of community members into the national effort to achieve healthy environments.

In the national quest for healthy environments, people constitute a major resource, both individually and in groups. Our experience confirms that people understand and are interested in the circumstances and events that influence

their environments. It is generally known that they are seeking opportunities to take responsibility.

The enduring impact of community participation is often witnessed during world environmental day celebrations. It is amazing just what can be achieved in one day. The enthusiasm displayed on this particular day can help us respond to one of our leading challenges mobilising people and enhancing their capacity to cope. The conclusion reached here is that community participation is not only valuable but essential for all Botswana.

Suggested Strategies for Community Mobilisation

A variety of strategies are suggested to assist in initiating and sustaining community mobilisation, involvement and participation. The focus is on helping communities to realise their potential for organising themselves, assembling and analysing their own information base, and developing and implementing their own priorities and plans. This potential is often masked by problems of dependency and lack of experience, education and skills (Community Based Strategy for Rural Development, 1977).

Community Empowerment

Empowerment is conceptualised as *the discovery of a community's strengths, the attainment of participatory competence, and an element of claiming resources from the state*. In terms of environmental management, empowerment generally refers to the *transfer of knowledge, initiatives, control, ownership of resources and decision-making responsibilities* to the participants (i.e. those affected by the problem). This can bring about change in the nature of people's role in development from passive dependent beneficiaries to active participants in managing the environment.

CBSRD report 1997:8 states:

In most instances the first step towards empowerment is to increase people's awareness and mobilise and build their participation and support. Government development programmes can contribute to empowerment by helping communities to establish capacity to organise and take on development activities at grass-root level, and by affording communities' discretion over the choice of activities and the way they are pursued.

Community-based Environmental Programmes

These should involve decentralised or bottom-up strategies. Many such

strategies are premised on the principle of empowerment and have been advocated mainly by NGOs e.g. Tlhokomelo Tikologo-Environment Watch, Botswana. This is an attempt to move away from the traditional top-down approaches to a more community-based. It represents a strategy which believes in promoting a more participatory mode of development by giving communities control over formulation, planning and implementation of decisions regarding in this case their environment.

The role of the government is to *facilitate community's efforts*, e.g., by making available technical expertise through its extension services. *These approaches generally entail democratisation and shifting of accountability to local level because of the belief that local people have ideas, skills and leadership qualities to manage their own affairs.* Such approaches are important to any activity requiring significant inputs of local knowledge, leadership and participation e.g. environmental management.

A critical requirement of this strategy is to secure participation of people in the community. This generally requires that there should be transparent and democratic structures for consultation and decision-making within the community. This could be done by strengthening and giving power to local institutions e.g. VDC, VHC, VET and PTA.

Co-ordination

It is important to co-ordinate the activities of various actors involved so that each knows what the other is doing. Together, they should ensure the attainment of one goal. There is need to establish an effective administrative mechanism and related institutional capacity to provide simple, effective channels of communication and decision making between central, district and community/village level, including NGOs, private sector and other mechanism. Though there are risks of frictions, conflicts and ambiguities between roles of different participants as well as duplication of efforts, it is hoped that a co-ordinated effort will minimise these problems. Politicians, notably the opposition often take advantage of these ambiguities to dismiss government programmes.

In addition, a well co-ordinated effort will ensure that people know the issues very well e.g. littering, costs and benefits involved and the resulting damage from neglect of environment. With the spirit of team work and mutual support it is likely that environmental issues will be discussed, especially with the youth. Targeting the youth is essential for it ensures continuity in human resource mobilisation for proper use and care of the environment. This could involve role plays, videos, theatre and television adverts as some of the projects to embark upon to dramatise environmental concerns.

Community Development Organisations (CDOs)

This refers to a *community leadership structure responsible for mobilising the community as well as directing and monitoring the community based development activities*. The CDO's could be considered as the specialist organ of the VDC concerned with community based projects. It could also be the umbrella organisation co-ordinating development activities for a community pursuing a common interest e.g. an environment protection and management project in a particular community.

For this strategy to work one needs community workers not office workers. That is, people who can effectively mobilise the community through the kgotla and other channels i.e. focused groups. It will also be charged with the responsibility to encourage networking and coalition building among village institutions and extension staff.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to re-emphasise that community mobilisation is easier said than done. Governments (both central and local) responsible for policy formulation often design plans, programme and implementation strategies which are not in line with Botswana views and aspirations in terms of their traditions, values and experiences. This has resulted in the failure of many environmental projects. There is need to review both governmental, private sector and NGO's policies in order to accommodate the needs of local communities in managing the environment.

Protection and management of the environment cannot occur unless the decisions and actions which lead to both come from the people who are directly affected. Control by communities over resources can instill a sense of ownership and encourage their conservation.

From the foregoing the following recommendations can be made:

- There is need to begin to develop policies that are pragmatic and recognise that people are an important resource to be exploited and put to good use.
- Government should be fully committed to adopting a purely participatory approach to development.
- Responsibilities of government and those of the civil society must be clearly spelled out.

- ❑ There is need to launch a national environmental civic educational campaign. This should also form part of the education system and should be taught to children from an early age.
- ❑ Planning and implementation capacity must be built into National Development Plans.

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