# Participatory development planning in Botswana: Exploring the utilisation of spaces for participation

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## Abstract

The article examines the utilisation of spaces for participation in the development planning processes in Botswana. It has often been argued that, contrary to the widespread espousal to participatory planning, Botswana's planning system remains non-participatory. What is perceived as a highly centralised planning system dominated by bureaucrats has often been cited as the greatest impediment to the country's participatory governance. Despite the above perception, the article demonstrates the fluidity of spaces for participation and how, with creativity, invited spaces for participation have been used to challenge unpopular state policies and practices.

## DEELNEMENDE ONTWIKKELINGSBEPLANNING IN BOTSWANA: VERKEN DIE BENUTTING VAN RUIMTES VIR DEELNAME

Die artikel ondersoek die benutting van ruimtes vir deelname in die ontwikkelings-beplanningprosesse in Botswana. Dit is al dikwels aangevoer dat, in teenstelling met die wydverspreide verkondiging vir deelnemende beplanning, bly Botswana se beplanningstelsel nie-deelnemend. Wat beskou word as 'n hoogs gesentraliseerde beplanningstelsel, oorheers deur burokrate, is dikwels ook beskou as die grootste struikelblok vir die land se deelnemende regering. Ten spyte van die bogenoemde persepsie, demonstreer die artikel die vloeibaarheid van ruimtes vir deelname en hoe daar met kreatiwiteit, genooide ruimtes vir deelname gebruik is om ongewilde staatsbeleid en praktyke uit te daag.

## MERERO YA TSWELOPELE E KENYELETSANG SECHABA NAHENG YA BOTSWANA: HO SHEBISA MEKHOA E SEBAKA SE KA SEBEDISOANG HO NA NE KENYELLETSO YA SECHABA

Serapa sena se shebisisa tsebediso ya sebaka sa kenyeletso ya sechaba tabeng ya merero ya tswelopele ya Botswana. Ho bile le di chebisiso tse ngata tse bontshang hore le ha ho kenyeletsa sechaba mererong ya dibaka e se e le ntho e tloaelehileng ebile e se e tsebahala, naha ya Botswana yona, ha e sebetse tjena mererong ya bona. Ho bonahala e le tsamaiso ya merero e ikoalletseng ka hare, e tsamaisoa ke baithuti fela. Ebile e boledisoa ke ba bangata hore ke ona motsamaiso ona oo kenang tseleng ya puso e kenyeletsang sechaba mererong ya sona. Ntle le taba ena e boletsoeng, serapa sena se bontsha tsamaiso e monate ya sebaka sa kenyeletso ya sechaba le ka mokho ho bula kellelo ho lumelletseng sebaka sa kenyeletso ya sechaba hore se hanahanane le ditsamaiso le dipheo tsa mmuso tse sa utloahaleng.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The participatory nature of the development planning process in Botswana is a highly contested subject. While state publications and documents project it as inclusive and participatory, alternative interpretations view the country's model of participation as limited in its transformative possibilities. Arguments that view the system as participatory cite local government structures which they argue, are "designed to facilitate people's participation in development" which, it is further contended, "reflected the long tradition of democratic consultation and devolved decision-making" (RoB, 1991: 445). Botswana's *District Planning Handbook* states that one of the aims of district development is to ensure that people are involved in rural development and that sustainable development is realisable through participatory planning. According to the *Handbook*, participation revolves around the idea that development is a process of defining and finding solutions to one's own problems (RoB, 1997a: 44). Participatory planning credos are also evident in the country's rural development strategy. The strategy, dubbed 'Community-Based

Rural Development Strategy' (CBRD), is regarded as introducing "a more effective and sustainable approach to rural development by substantially increasing the role of community participation and community leadership structure in identifying their own action plans" (RoB, 1997b: v). It defines participation as "involvement of communities and individuals in the various stages of development activities …" (RoB, 1997b: 7). Yet another document that corroborates the significance of public participation in planning is the *Physical Planning Handbook* which goes as far as proposing a template for participatory plan-making (RoB,1997c: 102).

Contrary to the above perceptions, critics of development planning process in Botswana contend that, despite widespread espousal of public participation, Botswana's planning system remains centralised and non-participatory. Tsie (1998: 9) described policy formulation and implementation in Botswana as technocratic, allowing hardly any participation by ordinary citizens. Nthomang (2007: 188) reported cases in which San community leaders decried lack of consultation in the formulation and implementation of policies directly affecting them.

This article revisits the debate on participatory planning in Botswana without necessarily adopting binary conception of participation implicit in the positions discussed earlier. It is contended that participatory planning is more nuanced than assumed by the two positions. An examination of the development policy processes in Botswana reveals the existence of what has been dubbed in the literature as spaces for participation (Gaventa, 2004). Of these spaces the article is particularly interested in 'invited spaces for participation' defined as spaces "into which people as users, as citizens, as beneficiaries are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities …'' (Cornwall, 2002: 24, cited in Gaventa, 2004: 35). The main questions addressed in this article is: Who utilises the invited spaces for participation? How are the spaces utilised and to what end?

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## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework within which Botswana's experience is discussed is informed by the concept 'spaces for participation', which currently forms the basis for more nuanced analyses of participation in development. To appreciate the concept, it is important to briefly discuss the changing conceptions of participation in the development discourse. Participation in development is widely regarded as an important component of the democratisation process in which individuals celebrate their citizenship. This is evident in the proliferation of terms that speak about and to issues pertaining to democratisation. Such terms include 'deepening democracy', 'extending democratic engagement' and 'building democratic polities'. As a concept, participation is highly contested and, as Cornwall (2002) points out, there are multiple understandings of the term. Hickey & Mohan (2004: 6) trace the history of participation to the colonial era when community development was introduced into the production system as a form of reigning in the colonised.

It is further contended that, as new schools of thought and institutional agendas emerged, participation was subjected to re-interpretation. Increasingly, instead of being utilised for maintaining the *status quo*, participation is viewed more as geared towards addressing social and political exclusion that characterises modern societies. This conception is captured in references to the "transformative potential of participation" (see, for example, Winkler, 2011: page no?). Changes in concepts and interpretations of participation ushered in what is viewed as a shift from regarding participants as beneficiaries to interpretation that view participants as "makers and shapers" (Gaventa, 2004: 29).

Increasingly then, the concept 'community participation' is being replaced by 'participatory citizenship' which, according to Gaventa (2004: 29), links participation in the political, social and community spheres. In the process, participation becomes a right and not an invitation offered to beneficiaries.

More nuanced analyses of participation employ the concept of 'spaces for participation' (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa, 2004; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Winkler,

2011). It is within these spaces that opportunities are created by actors – the state or citizens – for purposes of participating in policy formulation. Cornwall & Caelho (2007: 1) assert that such spaces may be provided and provided for by the state, and they may also be viewed as spaces conquered by civil society demands for inclusion. Within these spaces, voices and ideas jostle for attention (Cornwall, 2002: 2). Spaces for participation are conceived as a continuum that ranges from closed spaces, invited spaces, and created spaces (Gaventa, 2004: 35) to what Cornwall (2002: 19) calls "fleeting formations". Closed spaces are described as restricted to actors behind closed doors with no intentions of opening up to other actors. For their part, invited spaces are defined by Cornwall (2002: 24) as "those into which people as users, citizens, as beneficiaries are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities, be they government, supranational agencies or non-governmental organisations". Created spaces are defined by Gaventa (2004: 35) as "spaces claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders or created more autonomously by them". Cornwall's fleeting formations is yet another space of participation that is of interest to the case of Botswana. This is defined as "one-off meetings, events or exercises aimed at opening up of deliberations over policies or service delivery priorities" (Cornwall, 2002: 19).

Gaventa (2004: 35) describes the relationship between the spaces for participation as dynamic and that they are constantly "opening and closing through struggles for legitimacy, resistance, cooption and transformation". Cornwall (2002) introduces yet another attribute of spaces for participation that is considered important for the analysis of the Botswana case. Drawing on the Foulcauldian concept of 'strategic reversibility' of power, Cornwall (2002: 9) opines that "government invitations to participation are in themselves always already sites of resistance'' and that such "sites are productive of possibilities of subversion, appropriation and reconstitution''. Thus, according to Cornwall (2002: 9), particular spaces may be produced by the powerful, but filled with those whose alternative visions transform their possibilities. Spaces may be created with one purpose in mind, but used by those who come to fill them for something quite different.

The dynamic nature of spaces for participation is shared by other commentators on participatory development. Miraftab (2009: 43) argues, for example, that counter-hegemonic planning practices could be effected through "sanctioned spaces for participation". The contention is that, while such spaces might be created by the state, they can be innovatively used as sites for mobilisation for social transformation.

## 3. SPACES FOR PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN BOTSWANA

Within the policy landscape of Botswana, the state is the main architect of spaces for participation. However, in what is evidently a centralised policy set-up, the state subscribes to some notions of participation. State-sponsored spaces for participation have been used mainly to maintain the dominant position assumed by the state in policy-formulation processes. This is evident in two related areas, namely linkages between national planning and subnational planning and, secondly, the institutional structures for development planning.

Policy-formulation processes in Botswana are designed such that policies at subnational levels are interpretations of national policy. Since independence in 1966, Botswana has operated a system of development planning characterised by regular preparation of national development plans (NDPs). NDPs contain the national development strategy to be pursued by all development efforts in the country.

Implementation of the national development strategy is realised by preparing a hierarchy of development plans targeted at different spatial levels. These include at district level, district development plans (DDPs) and at settlement level, settlement development plans (SDPs). A DDP sets out the overall goals, direction and priorities to which all developments at district level should conform (RoB 1997: 78). These plans provide policy guidance and a framework for all levels of development effort whether they be implemented in a national programme or work with an individual farmers' group at the village level (RoB, 1997: 78). In terms of their relationship with NDP, providing inputs into the NDPs,

DDPs detail the implementation of the same plan (RoB, 1997: 79).

## 3.1 Spaces for participation: Invited or closed?

The foregoing discussion highlighted the hierarchical nature of the linkages between national and subnational planning where both district and local planning are perceived as detailing national planning. The question that needs to be addressed is the extent to which the policy processes described above are participatory. Is there provision for public participation in the formulation of the national development plan?

The preparation of the national development plan has been described as iterative (Mogae, 1996: 3). Arguing from the position that Botswana's planning system has always been based on the principle of 'bottom-up', Mogae (1996: 3) viewed local authorities as having a special responsibility to improve this system and make it more effective and participatory for the communities. Central to the formulation of the NDP is the National District Development Conference (NDDC). The event seeks to align district planning with national planning, particularly bringing consistency between district development plans and the national development planning. The NDDC process starts with local authorities consulting communities on their performance in the past plan period and communities' future priorities. The procedures involve extensive visits to different settlements within a given district. Local authorities prepare what is known as Keynote Issues Papers (KIPs) which summarise planning issues for the district and is circulated to all ministries. On the basis of KPIs, ministries then prepare Sectoral Key Issue Papers (SKIPs). In preparing SKIPs, ministries are encouraged to incorporate local authority priorities as contained in the KIPs. Both KIPs and SKIPs form the basis for discussions at NDDC.

Drawing from the conceptual framework, it can be argued that the preparation of the NDP hangs precariously between closed spaces for participation and invited spaces for participation. Participation in NDDC is by invitation and, as argued earlier, draws its participants mainly from central government and local government officers. Communities do not have direct access to this space. While actors from the private sector

and NGOs are invited, their role is more that of observers, although they can comment on what is already formulated. It is interesting to note that, in preparing their KIPs, ministries are only 'encouraged' to take district KIPs into consideration. By their very nature, NDDCs are public sector forums dominated by central government bureaucrats with little room for participation from non-state actors. The argument is that the NDDC agenda is drawn by central government officers and, therefore, defines the boundaries in terms of what can and cannot be discussed.

## 3.2 Spaces for participation: Government institution's role

Policy formulation and implementation is undertaken by institutions at different spatial levels: national, district and local/settlement levels. It is important to examine the nature of these institutions and the spaces for participation provided. Local government structures in Botswana consist of four key institutions, namely Tribal Administration, District Councils, District Administration, and Land Boards. These institutions are creations of different historical epochs in Botswana's quest for development and as such offer different possibilities for participatory development.

Of the four local government institutions mentioned, the oldest is the Tribal Administration which dates back to the pre-colonial period. As a result of the policy of Indirect Rule, the colonial period left the Tribal Administration mainly unchanged, as chiefs were left to attend to the development issues of their respective tribal territories. The introduction of modern institutions in the postcolonial period resulted in a substantial reduction of the administrative functions and responsibilities of the Tribal Administration. Despite the above, the Tribal Administration remains important to the development planning efforts in Botswana. This could be attributed to the institution of the *kgotla* and its tradition of open discussions which falls under the Tribal Administration.

The Local Government (District Councils) Ordinance of 1965 introduced District Councils. These are made up of popularly elected councillors as well as those councillors specially nominated by the Minister of Local Government. Within Botswana's representative democratic model, councillors are supposed to represent communities

that elect them and from time to time conduct public consultative meetings to brief the electorate on developmental issues and other matters of public interest. Apart from the politicians, other important actors within the district councils are the administrative staff headed by the District Council Secretary. Quite often, the council administrative staff represent councils in forums such as the NDDC.

The District Administration dates back to the colonial period and is considered a common feature in British colonial administration (Noppen, 1982). The colonial administration was represented in each tribal territory by a District Commissioner. Under the current local government structure in Botswana, the District Commissioner is the most senior representative of central government and heads all central government employees at district level. The role of the District Commissioner is currently viewed as the coordination of the range of development activities at the district level by the Central Government and Local Authorities (RoB, 1990: 448). Like the District Council staff, District Administration staff plays a prominent role in NDDC proceedings.

Tribal Land Boards were introduced in 1970 following the promulgation of the Tribal Land Act of 1968. Land Board membership consists of publicly elected members as well as of those nominated by the Minister of Lands and Housing. The Land Boards are responsible for the administration and allocation of tribal land for residential, commercial, arable, livestock-grazing and industrial purposes.

Given the above description of local level planning institutions in Botswana, it is important to return to the question concerning the extent to which the above structures facilitate participatory decision-making. As in the case of policy processes discussed earlier, the institutions show a precarious combination of closed and invited spaces for participation. Deliberations by Local Authorities are closed business to the general public. Although the public can sit in during District Council meetings, they cannot participate in the deliberations. The closed nature of spaces for participation in local government structures in Botswana is perhaps most evident in the characterisation of the administrative structures in Botswana as centralised. It has been argued, for example, that

decentralisation remains a myth in Botswana (Reilly, 1985). Epithets such as "administrative" or "bureaucratic" have been used to describe the state in Botswana (Picard, 1980: 313). The contention is that administrative cadres or the bureaucracy in Botswana play a dominant role in policy formulation.

At district level, the role of the District Administration in development planning is often used to justify the 'administrative state' thesis. The dominant position assumed by the District Administration officers in the policymaking process at district level is realised mainly through the operations of the District Development Committee. District Development Committees were introduced in 1970 amid protests from the District Councils. In terms of composition, the DDC is made up of senior field officers of government ministries, representatives of Council, Land Board and Tribal Administration (RoB, 1979). It is chaired by the District Commissioner, while the District Officer Development (DOD) serves as the Committee's secretary. The membership of the DDC has been described as "overwhelmingly administrative" (Picard & Morgan, 1985: 140).

From inception, DDCs were viewed by the District Councils as an overt attempt by central government to undermine council leadership at district level. The DDC was perceived as "a body which is neither elected nor appointed locally which is having a decisive influence over council decisions" (Kwele, quoted in Picard, 1979: 302). The decisive influence over council decisions alluded to above lies mainly in the functions and composition of the DDC. The functions of the DDCs include the supervision and co-ordination of all rural development activities at district level. This includes the preparation and subsequent management of the District Development Plans, the document which sets out the development priorities for the district. In addition to the above, the approval by the DDC is required for all district projects funded by the government (RoB, 1979).

The centralised nature of the administrative structures and their domination by bureaucrats leaves little room for public participation in policy formulation, hence lending credibility to the closed-spaces-for-participation argument, as proven by the Kanye Planning Area Development Plan (1997-2015). This plan includes five phases, namely inception, field surveys, draft proposals, comment (public scrutiny), and final plan. However, throughout the plan-preparation process, communities are indirectly represented by the Reference Groups (dominance by public sector/government officials); community involvement in the plan-making process remains minimal.

Spaces for participation were described earlier as lying delicately between closed and invited spaces, but mainly closed to communities. If the preceding discussion sought to demonstrate the existence of closed spaces for participation, when do the operations of the above institutions resemble invited spaces for participation? This is where the institution of the *kgotla* comes in. As spaces for participation, the *kgotla* can function as invited spaces for participation as well as a site for subversion or insurgency where organised groups can seek to influence development policies.

### 3.3 Spaces for participation: Kgotla's role

*Kgotla* has been defined as an authentic Tswana institution which, according to one traditional leader, "was created by our forefathers many years ago before recorded history …" (Kgosi Seepapitso IV, 1989: 212). It is a forum where matters concerning the nation and/or community are publicly discussed (Odell, 1985: 62). Every villager is expected to attend *kgotla* meetings and, theoretically, all members of the community can speak freely at such a forum. The *kgotla* is still recognised as the official forum of the village and enjoys high legitimacy compared to other institutions at village level. All village institutions derive their legitimacy from the *kgotla*, and decisions taken are viewed as binding on all members of the community.

*Kgotla* meetings are widely used in the planning process for solicitation of community views as well as information dissemination. During plan-making processes, usually planners or consultants arrange with the traditional leadership to convene a series of *kgotla* meetings. The practice is widespread, even in the country's urban areas – such meetings are organised and have become a formal way for public policy debates. Politicians in the form of Members of Parliament and councillors utilise *kgotla* meetings regularly for information dissemination and solicitation of ideas and proposals that could be tabled at council or parliamentary sittings.

The effectiveness of *kgotla* as a space for participation is a highly contested subject. It has been argued that, contrary to claims of a free speech at *kgotla* meetings, discussions are dominated by the elite. Studies have shown that public meetings are poorly attended (BIDPA, 2004). Apart from poor attendance, public meetings are problematic in that, as currently conducted, there are no mechanisms whereby communities can follow up on those issues not well understood during such meetings. Often the practice is that a delegation from the district or national headquarters would address a meeting and thereafter return to base. Poor attendance at *kgotla* meetings has also been attributed to what can be termed 'consultation fatigue' that has descended upon local communities. There seems to be hardly any coordination among different government departments to hold joint meetings. Instead, it is quite possible that in one month alone, the local community in a particular village can be addressed by four different departments all at different times. Even more critical is the observation that there is no guarantee that views expressed at the *kgotla* meetings ever find their way into policy documents (Molebatsi, 2003).

## 4. CASE STUDIES

The conceptual framework alluded to the dynamism and fluidity of the spaces for participation. Drawing on the concept of strategic reversibility of power, it was argued that practices such as invited participation were already sites of resistance (Cornwall, 2002: 9). In the following discussion, it is argued that, in providing invited spaces for participation, the *kgotla* has also been used as a claimed space for participation by actors who seek to influence public policy. Case examples from two settlements in Botswana were used.

### 4.1 Pilikwe settlement

The first case involved a decision in 2009 by the Ministry of Infrastructure, Science and Technology to construct a radioactive storage facility in Pilikwe village (Tshukudu & Garekwe, 2009). Villagers mobilised against this decision and unanimously opposed the proposal at a *kgotla* meeting held in July 2012

(Seretse, 2012). The significance of the *kgotla*, in this instance, is that it was used to legitimise the community's opposition to the location of the facility in Pilikwe.

A closer examination of the Pilikwe case suggests that those who spearheaded the protests were the village elite and professionals who are well informed in environmental issues and, therefore, fully appreciate the implications of the location of such a radioactive storage facility in their village. In their opposition to the facility, international standards stipulating that such facilities should be located where there was a willing host community were invoked. The group was well aware that, for legitimation purposes, they had to seek support of the villagers through the institution of the *kgotla*. Although the government claims that they will go ahead with the project, the fate of the project remains unclear, and it does appear that the protest by the villagers via the *kgotla* has slowed down, if not halted, its implementation.

## 4.2  Tlokweng settlement

The second case involved land allocation in Tlokweng, a peri-urban settlement east of Gaborone. The Tribal Land Act guides the allocation of land in the country's communal areas such as Tlokweng. The Act provides that any citizen of Botswana can be allocated land anywhere in the country. As a result of its proximity to Gaborone, Tlokweng is experiencing an influx of people seeking residential plots as well as rented accommodation. Consequently, land has become a scarce commodity in Tlokweng and other peri-urban areas around Gaborone. Amid such scarcity, the Tlokweng Land Board advertised 285 residential plots for allocation. Approximately 20.000 people flooded the Land Board offices to collect the application forms, of which 19.000 were submitted to the Land Board for consideration. To deal with the applications, the Tlokweng Land Board decided to use a lottery to pick successful applicants. The Tlokweng community used a *kgotla* meeting to voice their opposition to the lottery system used by the Land Board. In objecting to the Land Board decision, the community in Tlokweng resorted to differentiating between what they termed 'natives' and 'non-natives'. The complaint was that, of the 285 allocations made, only 8 were to 'natives' or 'indigenous' residents of

Tlokweng (Keoreng, 2012a). The matter was brought before the Land Tribunal which ruled that the Land Board should reconsider its decision. In return, the Land Board has appealed the ruling of the Land Tribunal (Morula, 2013).

While the Tlokweng case is still to be resolved, it has led to proposals on changes to the land-allocation practice in Botswana. The President of the Republic of Botswana and the Minister of Land and Housing have announced that government will introduce a quota system in land allocation. The proposed changes to be tabled before the July 2013 parliamentary session require that, when allocating land in peri-urban areas, 70% of the plots should be reserved for 'native' applicants (Lute, 2012).

The above two cases highlight the dynamism of the *kgotla* in providing multiple spaces for participation. In both instances, the village elite mobilise support for opposition to government practices. In as much as being used to maintain the *status quo*, the *kgotla* can be innovatively used to resist activities considered unpopular by local communities.

## 5.  CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article attempted to highlight the nature of spaces for participation in Botswana's development planning process. From the discussion provided, it can be argued that claims of participatory planning that pervades state publications do not seem to be reflected in practice. Spaces for public participation are dominated by closed and invited spaces. This is attributed to the centralised nature of the policy processes in the country. Forums such as the NDDC and the preparation of settlement development plans are dominated by bureaucrats with minimal roles for citizens. In the midst of such a centralised policy arena, the article demonstrated the versatility of the *kgotla* as an arena for multiple participatory spaces. While technocratic policy interventions use the *kgotla* for information dissemination purposes, it has also been used as claimed space for participation to challenge unpopular state policies and practices.

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