



**Reinventing African Chieftaincy
in the Age of AIDS, Gender,
Governance, and Development**

Edited by Donald I. Ray, Tim Quinlan,
Keshav Sharma, and Tacita A.O. Clarke

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13 The *Kgotla* and Traditional Leadership in Botswana

Mogopodi Lekorwe

INTRODUCTION

Botswana still remains one of the few sub-Saharan African countries that has sustained a long period of political liberty, including a multi-party system, free and fair elections, a free press, and a good human rights record. This record is partly explained by the fact that the country managed to successfully blend its traditional and modern institutions. The *kgotla*, headed by the chief is a key part of this. This is a forum where crucial decisions affecting the community and development in general are taken.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE *KGOTLA* AS A TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION

The *kgotla* has always been the central feature of Tswana society and has existed from time immemorial. It is an institution that dates back to the pre-colonial era. Thus politicians in Botswana are of the view that the country's parliamentary democracy is anchored on the traditional political structures of the *kgotla* (Molutsi and Holm 1990). Its history is well documented and it is not the intention here to delve into such analysis (Mgadla and Campbell 1989). It will only suffice to highlight some of the important aspects of the *kgotla* to set the context for the present discussion.

The *kgotla* is a Tswana traditional and respected place of assembly for the community and the chief to discuss issues concerning village administration, planning, and settling of disputes. The *kgotla* was the chief's office as there was no designated office building. Its significance and centrality as a traditional mechanism of consultation and policy-making is encapsulated in the following statement made by Schapera in the early 1940s:

All matters of public policy are dealt with finally at an assembly open to all the men of the tribe.... Such assemblies are held very frequently, at times almost weekly, and they usually meet early in the morning in the tribal council place, close to the chief's residence.... Since anybody present is entitled to speak, the tribal assemblies provide a ready means of ascertaining public opinion.... The discussions are characterised by considerable freedom of speech, and if the occasion seems to call for it, the chief or his advisors may be severely criticized ... such assemblies are frequently used by the Government as a means of informing the tribes about new legislation and other developments or of inquiry into local disputes (Schapera 1976)

Following Schapera's baseline research, other researchers came to the same conclusion regarding the significance of the *kgotla*. Kooijman sees the *kgotla* as the chief's "Council place where he listened to views, petitions

and complaints and gave orders for whatever he deemed necessary” (Kooijman 1980).

It was through the *kgotla* that traditional leaders mobilized communities to provide for facilities to local communities and to help those in need. Through the chief, who acted as the chief executive officer, the *kgotla* was a focal point as it performed administrative, consultative, and judicial functions. In addition, the *kgotla* possessed fiscal, developmental, and land management functions. Taxes were levied through the *kgotla* to raise revenue for local and national projects. Age regiments called through the *kgotla* were supervised by the chief to engage in public works such as building schools and constructing of roads, clinics, and bridges. These regiments also worked in the chief’s fields for the general welfare of the community (Odell 1985). Land allocation and management decisions were handled by the chief through the *kgotla*. Land rights for ploughing and commercial and residential land rights were carried out through overseers appointed by the chief in the *kgotla*. The management of grazing areas and the preservation of land were well defined and understood by all. Any indications of overcrowding or over-utilization were reported to the community through the *kgotla* and alternatives were sought.

The *kgotla* in the pre-colonial era had considerable powers, but these powers were dispensed in a democratic fashion. The constant presence of chief’s advisers at the *kgotla* and the constant consultation were very important to reduce the chance of autocracy and absolutism on the part of the chief. Another form of a check to reduce autocratic rule by traditional leaders was an advisory council, which consisted of the headmen of various wards. These ward heads could force the chief to consider views and opinions of people from other outlying areas. Though there was nothing compelling on the part of the chief to summon such a council, traditional leaders relied on them to communicate and test out reception of new policies (Ngcongco 1989).

While both the *kgotla* and the chief had considerable powers in the pre-colonial era, these changed somewhat during the Protectorate days. Further changes also took place after independence. The first piece of legislation introduced by the British colonial administration that negatively affected the powers of traditional leaders was the Order-in-Council of 1891. This proclamation established the basis of the administrative work and gave the high commissioner the powers to legislate and to

appoint administrative and judicial staff. The high commissioner was, however, ordered to respect

... any native laws and custom by which the civil relations of any native chiefs, tribes or populations under the majesty's protective are now regulated, except so far as the same may be incompatible with the due exercise of her majesty's power and jurisdiction. (Du Toit 1995, 23)

This order in effect meant that the chiefs were no longer responsible to their tribes, but to the colonial government.

The second piece of legislation that further reduced the powers of the *kgotla* as well as the chief was the Native Administration Proclamation Act of 1934, which basically changed Tswana law and custom. The proclamation regulated the judicial powers of chiefs and formalized the tribal court system and its jurisdiction. The various provisions of the proclamation reduced the chiefs to becoming mere servants of the colonial administration. The high commissioner now had powers to appoint chiefs, to refuse to recognize one and even to suspend a chief if he deemed such action necessary (Picard 1987; Lekorwe and Somolekae 1998). Some traditional leaders, such as Bathoen II and Tshekedi Khama, contested the 1934 proclamation as they saw it as limiting their powers. Specifically, they objected on the following grounds. First, that the creation of tribal councils actually changed the relationship between the chief and the *kgotla*, secondly, they protested against the restrictions placed upon the judicial authority of the chief, and, thirdly, they were not happy with the provision made for government intervention and regulation of the selection and deposition of chiefs. Consequently, the Native Tribunals Proclamations No. 75 of 1934 further curtailed the jurisdiction of the traditional leaders and stated that they could no longer hear cases of rape, murder, and culpable homicide.

In summary, the effect of all these proclamations introduced by the colonial administration meant the reduction and erosion of the powers of traditional leaders through the institution of the *kgotla*. These proclamations treated traditional leaders as a link between the colonial administration and the Africans, which ensured that they remained under the control

of the district commissioner. Thus, the *kgotla*'s own traditional powers and authority, derived from Tswana law and custom, was severely affected.

THE *KGOTLA* AS A VILLAGE INSTITUTION

Several analysts and researchers have noted the importance played by the *kgotla* as a consultative mechanism. In this context, consultation implies a process where decision-makers solicit the views of those whom the decisions will affect. What should be noted, however, is that there is very little room for debate once the chief has issued orders at the *kgotla*.

The *kgotla* is regarded as an indispensable unit without which no viable community government can be built in Botswana. Though criticisms have been levelled at the institution of *kgotla*, none of these have led to serious suggestions of doing away with the forum. Extension workers cannot contemplate any viable program undertaken at the village level without the use of the *kgotla*. It operates today, essentially the same way it did in the pre-colonial era with just a few changes. It is still being used extensively to solicit views from the community. The key player in the process is the traditional leader (*kgosi*) as the chief executive of the *kgotla*. This traditional leader heads the governance system and is the custodian of culture, custom, and welfare of the people. In the past, an elaborate ward system was in place, which the traditional leader used to rule over his subjects (Ngcongco 1989; Mompoti 2000). Presently the governance system utilizes the *kgotla*, which performs a number of functions.

A major role of the *kgotla* is its communicative function. The *kgotla* provides people with a means by which they come to an agreement as to what ought to be done with respect to a particular government program for the community. Traditional leaders also use the *kgotla* to discuss publicly and gather views on matters affecting their communities before government makes policy decisions. As the main point of contact within the community, discussions are conducted on issues related to policies and their implementation in a free atmosphere. Government officials, including politicians, such as members of parliament and councillors, also use the *kgotla* as a means of informing the various tribal communities about new legislation. Members of parliament and councillors are normally

expected to request *kgotla* meetings before and after parliamentary and council meetings to solicit views of the community. Most government staff who do extension work initiate their contact with the community through the *kgotla*. The traditional leaders or chiefs are able to contribute in the process of planning development in their own areas through this forum. The *kgotla* therefore serves as a two-way channel of communication between government and the people (Lekorwe 1989).

Traditional status plays an important role in determining the seating arrangement in the *kgotla*. The chief sits at the edge of the circled space in the shelter (*leobo*) and closest to him are his uncles and advisers. The older members of the tribe come next. The middle-aged, the young, and the women are normally expected to sit at the back. Women were traditionally expected to sit on the floor. Government officials, including some visitors, are given a prominent position, normally at the centre. *kgotla* meetings are announced at every place where the opportunity arises, including funerals. These meetings are given priority over others, any conflicting community events are supposed to give way to *kgotla* meetings. Teachers, social workers, and local police assist in spreading the message for the *kgotla* meeting. The media is also used, for example, Radio Botswana often announces these meetings particularly for big villages and when an important event takes place.

Although in the past *kgotla* meetings could be called at any time, there is sensitivity now to the time and day when these are called. In big villages, traditional leaders now prefer to call such meetings during the weekends when some members of the community working outside could be available. In small villages, it is still possible to call meetings during weekdays. There are still some practical problems related to the timing of these meetings. Traditional leaders have pointed out that Saturdays also are problematic as many people attend funerals on that day. Sundays also cause problems as some people attend church services on that day. It does seem that there is no perfect day for these meetings.

Personal behaviour is also important at the *kgotla*. As it is considered to be a sacred place, those who attend are supposed to be sober. Beer drinking is not allowed at the *kgotla*, except if there is a community ceremony going on. Calm behaviour is expected and all views are allowed in the spirit of *mmu a lebe o bua la gagwe* (*Everybody is free to speak candidly, and even to make mistakes*). This then implies that there is freedom

of speech and discussion is conducted in a free atmosphere. However, in practice, status tends to determine who can speak freely in *kgotla*. Those who have a recognized status, such as the chief's uncles, can speak for as long as they wish and may do so several times. This therefore shows that attendance and participation at *kgotla* meetings are two distinct things. Attendance does not necessarily mean those who attend are able to speak. Ngcongco (1989) also confirms that some lower-status groups such as the Bakgalagadi were never expected to speak at such meetings during the pre-colonial era, though they were free to attend *kgotla* meetings:

As children in the home, they were to be seen and not to be heard.... Bakgalagadi were children and their overlords were the ones who could and did speak for them (Ngcongco 1989, 40).

Although change has taken place since independence, these perceptions still abound in some areas. Similarly, though women are expected to attend *kgotla* meetings, the same level of participation is not expected from them in all the issues. Women tend to participate more actively in *kgotla* meetings on issues of development, compared to issues concerning culture. These perceptions are now changing gradually, and it is being realized that no issues can be treated as the exclusive preserve of men.

Local organizations play a crucial role in the success of rural development projects. The studies undertaken to determine the factors critical for the success of rural development projects have concluded that local action and involvement are critical. *kgotla* is the most representative body at the village level. All other organizations derive their authority from the *kgotla* as decisions taken at this forum are regarded as decisions taken by the entire village and are binding on every one. Because of its legitimacy, it is difficult to by-pass the *kgotla* and make any direct contact with the village on any issue of major importance.

Since independence in 1966, the government has formulated five-year plans to guide and inform the process of development. The government built this process on the institution of the *kgotla*, where villages are given an opportunity to forward their needs and wishes that they would like to have incorporated in the coming development plan (Byram et al. 1995).

Input into the planning process is expected to take place through the village-based grassroots organization known as the Village Development Committee (VDC), which receives support from *kgotla*. VDCs were set up by a presidential directive in 1968 and were seen as modern and development-oriented organizations that were supposed to strengthen the *kgotla*'s consultative process. VDC's were supposed to ensure community participation in national development plans. Though these were initially targeted for rural areas, the VDC idea was adopted in urban areas as well and Ward Development Committees (WDC) were created to perform a similar community mobilization role in urban areas. VDCs were to coordinate all village institutional activities, including the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), women's organizations, and other voluntary organizations. Since their inception, their functions have always been the subject of discussion, more especially their relationship to the *kgotla*. The directive establishing VDCs (including WDCs) states that these committees are to be elected by the *kgotla* and are also to be responsible to the *kgotla*. In other words, VDCs are seen as the development sub-committee of the *kgotla*. They are accountable to the community through the *kgotla*. Their main roles are:

- (a) to identify and discuss local needs;
- (b) to formulate proposals for the development of the village which it represents;
- (c) to determine a plan of development for the village area;
- (d) to determine the extent to which people are willing and able to develop the community on a self-help basis;
- (e) to elicit the help of the district commissioner and other development agencies in their improvement and to provide a mechanism of contact between the headman, the councillor, the people and the district council in order to make the council better informed as to the needs of certain areas, and thereby help in the district council responsibilities to provide a district plan for development; and

- (f) to represent villages in development matters and to act as a source and reference point in matters pertaining to village development (MLGL 1968: Cabinet Memorandum; District Planning Handbook, 1997).

The VDC is composed of ten members who are elected at a *Kgotla* meeting. There are five executive and five additional members. The chief/headman and the councillor are ex-officio members. Council and central government departments post extension workers to the various villages to provide technical input into the work of V/WDC. These organizations are regarded as playing a meaningful role at the grassroots level. The VDCs are expected to facilitate bottom-up planning as they reach out to the smallest cluster of communities, and, in this way, it is felt they could be able to identify the development needs at that level. Experience, however, shows that village development committees have not lived up to their expectations. Some have been active, while the majority has done very little. One of the problems contributing to their ineffectiveness is that they are not taken seriously by the government establishment, as well as the ordinary members of the community. Their members are not given proper training regarding their responsibilities. If these people can be given proper training and orientation, VDCs could sensitize different communities about their responsibilities and could give meaning to democracy (Report of the Second Presidential Commission on Local Government Structure in Botswana, 2001). Communication between the District Council staff and VDCs leaves a lot to be desired. There is a feeling among members of the VDCs that they are not fully consulted on developmental issues but only when their contribution is needed, for instance, when building teachers' houses or when important people visit their areas. Concerns have been registered in some places that some councillors are not very supportive of the efforts of VDCs. Though they are ex-officio members of these bodies, they do not attend meetings regularly and also show very little interest in their work. Traditional leaders are the key role players in the function of the VDCs. The VDCs find it difficult to function in a desirable manner when relations between traditional leaders and democratically elected leaders are strained (Report on the Review of the Rural Development

Policy: BIDPA, 2001). The VDCs that perform better have strong links with the chiefs.

The *kgotla's* role in consultation with the community is likely to continue. Although opinions differ on the extent of the role of this institution, it is clear that it still enjoys a lot of support from the people. A number of respondents interviewed questioned the nature of the consultation that takes place at the *Kgotla*. The main concern is that attendance at *kgotla* meetings has declined. Attending *kgotla* meetings is no longer compulsory. The decisions taken at the *kgotla* can no longer be regarded as representative of the community (Confidential interview in Tutume). Some are of the view that, although the *kgotla* makes consultation easy as the chief is used to mobilize people to attend, it is dominated by a few vocal members. An elder from Masunga in the north-east is of the view that the nature of consultation is symbolic as the government uses the *kgotla* to present issues that have already been decided elsewhere. A study undertaken by BIDPA (2001) also confirms this fear that the national development planning process, which is supposed to involve bottom-up consultation and decision-making from the village level upwards through the *kgotla* and the district development committee (DDC), is far from the ideal. The reality is that extension officers dictate the pattern and manner of local development instead of consulting. The VDCs are relegated as mere agencies of implementation of government projects, which deal with local infrastructure and services. The *kgotla* is generally used to legitimize the decisions taken at the higher levels. On whether traditional leaders uphold traditional values through the *kgotla*, opinions are equally divided. It is felt by some that chiefs no longer uphold traditional values because they are basically working like civil servants and therefore are expected to do what the government directs. This was the perception in places like Tutume. In some areas, it is felt that traditional leaders only uphold traditional values that are advantageous to them. Thus there is an element of self-interest in what the chiefs do. Another point of contention is that chiefs may not be able to uphold traditional values as some may not be accustomed to such traditions. One example is in D'Kar, where one respondent argued that

... the chief cannot uphold traditional values in this area because he does not come from the area. He is a Mongwaketse

appointed by the government, and the people of D'Kar did not choose him, so he cannot instill and uphold traditional values (interview with councillor).

The role of *kgotla* in urban areas is limited. This is partly because the majority of people in urban areas have some form of education and therefore are able to get many things done without having to go through the *kgotla*. In addition, the *kgotla* does not have the same level of respect in the urban areas because many of those who are in charge of the *kgotla* are appointed by the government and have very little background in traditional rule. Another point of contention is that it is difficult to uphold any tradition in the urban areas as people are intermixed and have different customs and cultures.

Traditional leaders, irrespective of whether they are in the urban or rural areas, are expected to maintain law and order. This is done by trying cases in the *kgotla* and even administering corporal punishment as some form of a deterrent. Most people in rural areas consider corporal punishment to be important and feel that it should continue as it is part of Tswana tradition. A notorious group called “Makgaola seven” in Kanye was brought under control due to the employment of corporal punishment. Again in Molepolole the then regent of Bakwena, Kgosikwena Sebele, used a vigilante group from a tribal regiment to fight terror groups in the village. This terror group was originally known as “Maspotis” – the miscreants – and rechristened themselves “Ma DRC.” The regiment (Mophato) set out each evening to patrol the streets until the early hours of the morning. Those who were caught and could not give a credible account of why they were still up and about at that time of the night were taken to the *kgotla*, where they received four strokes of the cane the following morning.

The *kgotla* deals with diverse and complex issues. Once an issue becomes a concern to the community, one way of dealing with the problem is to bring it to the attention of the chief who in turn brings it to the *kgotla* for debate. The *kgotla* therefore addresses a wide spectrum of issues like development issues related to health, education, service delivery, crime prevention, complaints about the implementation of government policies, land issues, and government policies in general. Issues of interest to *kgotla* differ from area to area. For example, land issues are discussed in the

kgotla mainly in the areas where land seems to be a problem. Equally, issues of protection of wildlife are visible in Maun and Kgalagadi regions. Though diverse issues are discussed in the *kgotla*, not all of them receive the same level of attention and debate.

The relationship between traditional leaders and party politics is complex, though the rules are simple. Chiefs and headmen are not allowed to be involved in party politics. This means they cannot run for office unless they resign their position. When the former chief of the Bangwaketse, Bathoen, joined politics to contest elections, he resigned from his position as chief. He joined the opposition party, the Botswana National Front (BNF) in 1973 and defeated the then vice-president of the country (who later became president), Quett Masire. One of the reasons why the *kgotla* has become a place where civil servants and communities can dialogue on policy implementation issues is because party politics is not allowed in this forum. At the time of independence, the chiefs refused to allow political parties to hold rallies at *kgotla*. They did this because they feared the anti-chief posture of those who were leading political parties at the time. They insisted that the *kgotla* should be non-political, meaning that the *kgotla* should not be a place where any organized party activity could take place.

Botswana is undergoing some form of transformation. Ian Khama Seretse Khama, who is the president, has taken the chief's non-political role to another level. For a number of years, Ian Khama was a military officer and rose in the ranks of the army to become the commander of the Botswana army. As the first son of the late Sir Seretse Khama, and in line with tradition as already mentioned, by rules of premogeniture, he was to become chief. Ian Khama decided to be installed as chief in the 1980s. However, he did not take on his formal duties as chief but instead had one of his relatives perform this role while he continued with the army. When Masire resigned from the office of president in 1998, Khama announced his resignation from the army to join politics. He was immediately appointed the vice-president and contested by-elections on the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) ticket and won overwhelmingly. In joining politics, Khama did not resign his position as chief, as required. The attorney general ruled that Khama did not have to do so since he had never taken his duties as a chief. Due to this controversial ruling, Khama decided to take advantage of this dual status as a politician and a chief at the same

time. In 1999 he attended campaign rallies where he repeatedly presented himself as a chief and not a politician.

During the consultation process to the national development planning process, issues of health and education are discussed in the *kgotla*. Educational issues discussed here include projects undertaken by VDCs, such as the building of houses for teachers. With regard to health issues, traditional leaders' involvement goes as far as facilitating *kgotla* meetings to elect or have volunteer members of the Home Based Care for the HIV/AIDS patients. Some chiefs have now started opening up and talk about HIV/AIDS during funerals.

Opinions are divided on the issue of whether politics should be discussed in the *kgotla*. Some feel that party politics should not be discussed because the institution is supposed to be a neutral place where all interests are considered. Opening the *kgotla* for party political issues will cause commotion since politics is by nature divisive. Yet another view is that politics can be discussed in the *kgotla*; as one respondent in D'kar put it: "politics is the heartbeat of a community ... socio-economic issues cannot be isolated from political issues."

An interesting observation is that while the majority is of the view that party politics should not be discussed in the *kgotla*, they also argue that chiefs should also not be seen to be taking part in political meetings. From time to time chiefs are invited to officiate at political meetings. This makes some members of the community uncomfortable. In 2002 the then paramount chief designate of Bakwena (now installed) *Kgosi Kgari Sechele III*, was invited to officiate at the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) youth congress in Molepolole. In defending the action of the chief, the secretary general of the BDP, who is also the member of parliament for the area, Daniel Kwelagobe, said they invited the chief in his capacity as the "father of the District." This was not the first time a chief officiated at such a gathering. Bathoen II, *Kgosi Linchwe II*, and Letsholathebe have done this before. It is not correct to have chiefs in party forums as this can create suspicion in the minds of many about their neutrality to party politics.

The youth seem to be less interested in many of the issues discussed at the *kgotla* and as a result do not bother to attend these meetings. Several studies, including the Democracy Research Project study, confirm that the youth say they are not interested in many of the issues discussed.

Trust is one of the important attributes of a leader. Asked who they would choose between a politician and a traditional leader, the majority of the respondents preferred a traditional leader as they felt they could be trusted. Moreover, they stay in office for a longer time and therefore ensure continuity. It is worth noting that traditional leaders are still perceived as playing the role of problem-solver, as can be seen from the results of a survey conducted by the Democracy Research Project of the University of Botswana in 1987. About a quarter of the rural sample thought the chief would be the most responsive to solve a problem in the local community. Those who opted for a politician said that a politician is broadminded and people have the liberty to exercise their democratic right to vote them out if they no longer do as they promised. There is also another view that says the two complement each other and therefore cannot make a choice between the two. A traditional leader, it is argued, is needed in a traditional forum such as the *kgotla* while a politician also has a role on issues that are political. One of the key variables that may shape the perception of any institution's legitimacy and trustworthiness is the extent to which its leaders are involved in corruption. Corruption is here understood to mean "where those in positions of power take money or a gift to do their job." Then respondents were asked whether they think chiefs are involved in corruption. An interesting observation is that many of the respondents said chiefs are also human beings, and if other people are involved in corruption they may not escape it. However, the predominant perception is that chiefs are not involved in corruption. Where there are indications that there is corruption, it might just be lack of understanding or what the respondents referred to as "weak chieftainship."

It appears that the role of chieftainship as an embodiment of Tswana body politic and a custodian of cultural values has diminished. This process was begun by the colonial administration and has since been continued by the post-colonial state in Botswana. Different opinions have been expressed regarding the usefulness of the institution in the twenty-first century. These opinions come in the wake of globalization, which among others embraces concepts such as diversity, merit, skills, and innovation. Questions have been raised as to whether we should be striving to live in the glory of our feudal past, more especially where chiefs occupy their positions by virtue of their birth ("Molobe," *Mmegi*, 2002). To test the perceptions regarding these issues, we asked whether they think

chieftainship has outlived its usefulness. Opinions were divided on the issue. Some felt that chieftainship has outlived its utility and therefore can be done away with. The majority, however, felt that the chieftainship was still useful. It is an institution that will never outlive its utility as long as we have the majority of people in the rural areas who would like to continue practising their traditional way of living. Only in one area, in Tutume, almost all those interviewed felt that chieftainship is no longer useful. In general, those who supported chieftainship argued that it should be modified and strengthened by giving chiefs more resources.

THE *KGOTLA* AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

There is no consensus among development experts, donors, and politicians in Botswana on the importance of traditional local institutions such as the *kgotla* in the development process. Some argue that any support given to such an institution is a regressive step. Still others see the support of this traditional institution as a threat to political structures. Those who recognize the importance of this institution are not well placed to articulate their views. The majority of them reside in the rural areas. Politicians generally reject traditional institutions in defence of the modern institutions in which they are actively involved.

In 1979 the Presidential Commission on Local Government Structure, which was chaired by the then vice-president of Botswana, the late L.M. Seretse, expressed the continuing trust that rural people placed in their traditional institutions. The commission noted that these traditional institutions have an important role to play in maintaining the fabric of society:

... it recognised that change in society is inevitable and not necessarily undesirable as more people adopt "modern" ways of living.... The Commission believes that the only sound way to preserve the nation's culture is to restore the people's faith in their own leaders and traditional society.

In support of the same sentiments, the 2001 Presidential Commission on Local Government Structure chaired by the then member of parliament, who later became the Minister Wildlife, Trade and Tourism, Ms P. Venson, concluded that traditional institutions are still held in high esteem. The commission concluded that

... the role of traditional leaders in Botswana remains pivotal to development process. The principle of consultation continues to be dependent on the kgosi and his kgotla. The convening of community meetings and enabling their participation depends on the institution.... Success in service delivery depends on the extent to which the communities are involved and informed about development in their villages. (Report on Local Government Structure 2001, 96)

From the foregoing, it is clear that traditional leaders and their *kgotla* are still central to rural development in Botswana. To treat the *kgotla* as just a mere traditional institution and no more denies it the role it can play in the socio-economic development of the country. The findings from the TAARN research indicates that the *kgotla* is able to isolate area specific needs of various communities. Through the *kgotla*, communities are able to voice their complaints to their representatives regarding the implementation of government policies. Through *kgotla* meetings, communities have complained to various representatives, particularly members of parliament, about the lack of implementation of government programmes. The *kgotla* is still seen as the “premier consensus-reckoning forum in Botswana – providing for local inputs into the community decision-making that rival any democratic system in the world” (Odell 1985; 79).

There is no denying that traditional leaders have not been able to perform some of their functions satisfactorily due to a number of reasons. Shortage of resources is often cited. Their effectiveness in the development process varies greatly within the country. Another important factor is personality. Some of the traditional leaders see their role as mainly preserving the traditions of their tribal groups within the modern system. Thus Linchwe sees the chief as a “social engineer who provides leadership as the community decides whether to modify, develop or abolish certain organisations or practices” (Holm and Molutsi 1989, 99).

Chiefs like Linchwe have done quite a number of things within their community to preserve their culture. The most notable one is the revival of the initiation schools for both boys and girls in his tribe. These schools are meant to emphasize the tribe's history and culture. Though at times he appears to resist change, he has also encouraged women and the young to attend *kgotla* meetings.

There are also those leaders who see chieftainship as simply continuing old traditions. This group is likely to be content with administering justice in the *kgotla*, calling meetings and meeting visitors to their villages. Such leaders fail to address other social problems facing their communities.

THE *KGOTLA*, TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP, AND THE FUTURE

Some researchers are of the view that the importance of traditional leadership and the *kgotla* is slowly eroding as modernizing forces gain momentum. This decline, according to them, is also due to the decrease in the constituency of chiefs in the face of urbanization. It is felt that the areas of influence for chiefs, especially in the rural areas, are being de-populated as many people migrate to cities and peri-urban areas. Also the government and the business community transfer their employees all over the country. Consequently, those who work for these sectors are composed of people who come from different tribes who may have very little loyalty to some of the village chiefs.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that emerges from this chapter is that, even though more and more Batswana are developing interest in modern institutions, they still value and respect traditional institutions. People in the rural areas continue to have respect for their traditional leaders. Traditional leaders and the *kgotla* still remain central to the formulation and implementation of public policies and district level development plans. Traditional leaders,

through the *kgotla*, can play an important role in the transition to a more democratic society. Traditional leaders can through the *kgotla* spearhead or resist change in society. The *kgotla* can also be instrumental in keeping law and order through the use of regiments.

The greatest challenge is for the government of the day to blend the traditional and modern institutions for the greater benefit of society. As Mpho Molomo rightly emphasizes in his chapter, culture is an intergral part of a people's existence and therefore must be promoted, nurtured, and deepened as society develops.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the institution of chieftainship contributes immensely to African governance in general and Botswana in particular. Traditional leaders should be mindful and subscribe to the changing times, but this does not mean throwing away the respectful culture that it has built. It is important to put measures in place to strengthen the institution. As more and more youthful and educated chiefs ascend to the throne, as is the case in Botswana, this will make the institution more responsive to the problems facing the youth and better placed to tackle the challenges facing society, like crime, poverty, and HIV/AIDS. African leaders must take stock of the moral fabric of society and think about re-inculcating the lost cultural values, which produce responsible men and women.



KGOTLA AT MOCHUDI. (PHOTO: KESHAV SHARMA.)

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