

Leadership in Civil Society Organisations in Botswana

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Policy Brief

1. Introduction

This policy brief is based on a study conducted in Botswana from June 2001 – February 2002 as part of a larger regional research project on Leadership, Civil Society and Democracy in Africa. In Botswana, the research was based on two non-governmental organisations, namely, Emang Basadi Association and Molengwane Ikemeleng Producer Cooperative. The study addressed the following questions:

- a) What are the characteristics and qualities of the organisation's leaders?
- b) How does the organisational context and social base of the organisation influence the nature of leadership?
- c) What conceptions of democracy and democratic principles are held by the organisation's leaders?

2. Major Issues Raised in the Report

The review of the literature for this study revealed that some of the organisations of civil society have the potential to make a significant contribution to the process

of democratisation in Africa, even though this contribution is adversely affected by the fact that these organisations are relatively weak and unstable. Some of the factors that contribute to this weakness are the organisations' economic capacity, their political context, and organisational structures. Examples cited are policies of the state towards civil society, issues of governance, and inadequate funding as well as human resources capacity.

In Botswana, the literature suggests that, overall, the organisations of civil society have been relatively weak in terms of constituting an autonomous base for influencing public policy and exerting democratic pressure on the state. Furthermore, the development of community-based organisations that are likely to extend grassroots participation in decision-making is at an early stage and therefore their significance for the democratisation process is difficult to assess.

Given this background, it was therefore important to study the nature of leadership in civil society organisations in Africa from the point of view of democracy. A qualitative study of two organisations in Botswana, namely, Emang Basadi Association and Ikemeleng Producer Cooperative, revealed that both organisations have been effective in meeting their goals and contributing to national democracy. However, there are questions with regard to the quality and sustainability of these organisations

because both have been operating in an economic and political environment that has been stable and generally facilitative of their activities but whose future is uncertain. Furthermore, both organisations are experiencing changes that pose significant challenges to their leadership.

As a national NGO, Emang Basadi Association has had a discernible impact on public policy related to the rights of women and on the process of democratisation since its establishment in 1986. Its leadership has exhibited seven key characteristics, namely, vision and personal commitment; pragmatism; commitment to alliance-building; non-partisan politics; advocacy and organisational skills; commitment to internal democracy; and volunteerism. Emang Basadi has provided a model of an effective NGO, but sustaining its impact in the future presents significant leadership challenges, particularly with regard to financial sustainability.

Ikemeleng Producers Cooperative, on the other hand, is a community-based organisation in a small rural settlement that has been successful in promoting grassroots participation in decision-making since its formation in 1991. It has the institutional form of a cooperative based on a Western model, but its underlying values and relationships are rooted in indigenous culture. Its leadership has exhibited a transformational democratic family leadership style guided by a clear vision and

values, particularly a commitment to promoting democratic values. It provides a model of a community-based organisation promoting the collective welfare of a kinship group through joint economic activity and mutual aid. Its projected expansion (including the development of an ostrich farm activity and the engagement of professional staff) will create major challenges for the family-based leadership.

It is important to emphasise that both organisations have been operating in an economic and political environment that has been stable and generally facilitative of their activities. Unfortunately, the future of this environment cannot be predicted. Also, both organisations are experiencing changes that will provide significant challenges to their leadership, especially as they relate to organisational sustainability. This reveals the vulnerability characteristic of civil society organisations in Africa.

3. Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have definitely confirmed that well-led civil society organisations are a valuable instrument for democracy. They have also demonstrated the crucial significance of strengthening the organisations of civil society if they are to play an effective role in the democratisation process. Therefore, the major recommendation of the report is the need to provide

sustained support and strengthen the partnerships necessary to make it possible for civil society organisations to achieve the objectives of democracy in Africa. The following are specific strategies with identified implementers.

a) Implications for Government and Other Stakeholders

?? *Build on what exists:* Government, umbrella NGOs, and the international community should support the goals and principles of CBOs, especially grassroots or community-based organisations such as Ikemeleng Producer Cooperative, instead of imposing their own agenda or even the global agenda. For example, the major conclusion of this study is that a curriculum of leadership development would need to prioritise the development of attitudes and values over knowledge and skills acquisition since two of the key leadership characteristics in these two organisations are personal commitment and strongly held values. Unless this is done, there is a danger that the issue of leadership will be oversimplified and a real opportunity to build new partnerships between Government and umbrella NGOs and civil society organisations may be lost. As one participant of Ikemeleng Producers Cooperative

put it, “we have to constantly remind some stakeholders that we need your support and assistance but not to be told what to do”.

- ?? *Capacity building:* For the leadership to have an impact on democracy, it is essential that both the Government and civil society organisations have the human and financial resources. Significant funding will be required for coordination, participatory research analysis, and advocacy activities especially for grassroots organisations such as Ikemeleng. In providing support to CBOs, priority should be given to funding existing leadership structures instead of expensive new bureaucratic structures. For example, strategic plans for both Emang Basadi and Ikemeleng show a move away from voluntary leadership strategy to professional leadership. Are they ready for this? Have they had time to weigh the costs and benefits?
- ?? *Establish a leadership network:* Based on the finding that confirms that many civil society organisations welcome access to best practice, there is need for assistance in the development of independent NGO networks and interaction among professional bodies in Africa. The perceived advantage is the diffusion of

leadership skills and democracy analysis in particular. It is recommended that selection of information to be shared should not only be based on countries with a track record of commitment to democracy but also include cases where difficulties are likely to be experienced. DPMF could assist in promoting regional leadership and policy networks, building on the efforts of umbrella organisations such as BOCOBONET and BOCONGO in Botswana.

b) Implications for Civil Society Organisations

- ?? *Independence:* For purposes of sustainability, it is important that civil society organisations develop their own capacity and not be heavily dependent on the government and donors as shown in the two cases.
- ?? *Leadership training:* Ensuring that both the coordination and the pace of the organisation's development are not imposed by external factors requires that the organisation's leadership be effective with its relations such as consensus-building based on trust. This requires leadership training.

?? *International networking:* Securing access to information, especially on the experiences of colleagues implementing a similar process both nationally and in other countries, has to be the responsibility of civil society organisations themselves. Therefore, initial support for exchange of experience and information-sharing mechanisms should be user-friendly and sensitive to local conditions. For example, dissemination of information should be in the local language and the predominant media should be the radio. Exchange visits and study tours will also be an efficient means for organisations to learn from others who have used successful civil society leadership processes.

4. Conclusion

The study on Leadership, Civil Society and Democracy in Botswana has confirmed that well-led civil society organisations are a valuable instrument for democracy. Although the two case studies analysed leadership in two very different organisational contexts, they have demonstrated the crucial significance of the need to strengthen the organisations of civil society if they are to play an effective role in the democratisation process. This policy brief has also identified the focus of a curriculum

on leadership development as one that has to prioritise the development of attitudes and values over knowledge and skills acquisition. Two of the key leadership characteristics of the organisations studied are personal commitment and strongly held values.