

The family and National Development in Botswana: A plea for research

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Introduction

There has been sufficient concern in Botswana about the family that it has become a subject of several radio debates and panel discussions. Recently, a National Law Reform Committee was set up to look into, among other things, the existence of both customary and statutory laws relating to marriage. Whatever the success of the Law Reform Committee will prove to be in the future, for now, it does represent a significant formal recognition by government that there are serious problems in this area of concern. By reflecting on field experiences, teaching as well as public discussions of the subject, this paper calls attention to an area of social research which is contemporary and relevant, but which has not enjoyed systematic attention hitherto. The aim of this paper will be to illustrate how the modern Tswana family as it is found today throughout the country, to a lesser or greater extent, does not correspond with its modern ideal as well as its legal conception. This departure from the defining characteristics creates problems for family life and in the long run have retarding effects on community, and by extrapolation, National development potentials.

Traditionally, a Tswana family consists of a man, his wife or wives and their unmarried children, own or adopted. One or more families would make up a household; the group of people living in the same collection of huts. Several closely related, households, living together in the same part of the village, would make up the family-group. One or more family-groups organized together into a well defined local administrative unit would make up the ward. Several of these wards put together would constitute a village or community. The families belonging to a ward would be closely related to their headman through descent in the male line from one common ancestor (Schapera, 1938:12). It was seldom for the household to be based upon a polygamous marriage, and even in the olden days, most of the men had only one wife. Nowadays, monogamous marriages are the rule and polygamy is virtually unheard of.

The modern "ideal" of a family is not inconsistent with that of the past. Essentially the idea of family involves (1) legal union of man and woman plus their offspring — the family of procreation; (2) economic cooperation centered around the construction of a

homestead and the establishment of a common residence for all members of the family; (3) socialization of children through the inculcation of principles, the building of character and the teaching of social skills; (4) general socio-economic advancement and as much as possible a general improvement in the status of the family in the community; (5) establishment of a sense of belongingness and companionship as well as general social psychological satisfaction based on a diffuse sense of family achievement and belongingness to a community.

This idealized picture of the family is largely non-existent in our days. In practice, the ideal, traditional or modern family, has increasingly become a romanticized entity of the largely unknown "golden past" remembered with nostalgia by a generation that never in reality experienced it. In concrete terms, the modern Tswana family as a statistical, tangible, quantifiable, empirical and meaningful entity, does not meet any of the criterion which constitute its traditional or modern definition.

The union of man and woman

The union of man and woman is a practical legal matter made possible through predisposing social realities. But marriage as a social institution has generally broken down. Legal separation and divorce could conceivably already be a lucrative business for young lawyers. In the rural areas, Kerven (1979) reports that the marriage chances of young women have been seriously affected. She points out that many unmarried mothers are so disillusioned with the idea of marriage that they claim they would rather do without a husband. Indeed, even among the older women, one finds more and more single women unmarried, divorced or legally separated. Marital instability is simply "the main event in town." Colclough and McCarthy (1980) argue that the distortion in the young adult population; the absence of so many males, has, over the years seriously affected the marriage chances of young women, and has raised the average age of marriage.

Overall, there has developed poor attitudes towards the legal union of man and woman which has implications for Family Law, including conditions of marriage; relations with relatives-in-law; domestic authority and responsibility; sexual relations; divorce; fate of widows; legitimacy of children; parental control; guardianship and minority status; laws of inheritance;

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rape; wrongs against family rights; adultery; child theft; etc.

Economic cooperation

The role of the household as self-sufficient economic unit has been greatly reduced by migrant labour and dependence on the extended family or family-group, with several generations living together, as a stable socio-economic entity has virtually vanished. Households deprived of male labour are unlikely to plough, or they will plough late, leading to low acreages and low productivity. Apparently 40 percent of female-headed households fail to plough in any one year compared to 20 percent for male-headed households (Livingstone and Srivastara, 1980:25).

Of the many unwed mothers, at least half of them are not receiving any support from the fathers of their children (Brown, 1980:11). This burdens the women and in many instances the woman's parents, especially if she continues to live at home or to leave her children at home while she goes out to work. Generally, women carry out agricultural tasks which customarily have been considered men's responsibility and as such are less psychologically and otherwise prepared for them. On the other hand, as Kerven pointed out, these tasks will conflict with other necessary tasks for women, e.g. child care. The result is that many agricultural tasks are either not done by women, in the absence of men, or are not done at all. It is not surprising therefore to find that female-headed/male-absentee households tend to be among the poorest of the poor families.

Brown (1980) and others use this and other evidence to show that women have had a "raw deal" and therefore recommended that government should give women special assistance. We believe however that any support of any part of the family that does not look at the family as a whole unit is likely to bear little fruit. The point is not that men are neglecting women. The Rural Income Distribution Survey carried out in 1974-1975 showed that mineworkers in South Africa frequently send back remittances of R40 on the average to their families through the mail. In addition, they often bring back durable household goods bought in South Africa, typically amounting to R40 per returning migrant. The third type of cash brought home is one based on a payment deduction scheme called "deferred pay" which depending on the distance between the original point of recruitment from his home (in Botswana) and his ability to avoid the temptation to spend it on frivolous items, a mineworker may take up to R300 in cash and goods to his wife and/or parents. It is true that some men never send anything home. But evidence indicates that the great majority of them send something, however little.

Both the efforts by women to do something of an economic nature to support the family, and the men's efforts to send some money home to support the family indicate that, in spite of the unwelcoming socio-economic parameters which tend to limit if not eliminate their efforts to develop the family, members of the family are basically committed to behaviours which demonstrate economic cooperation and respons-

ibility. It is unlikely that such cooperation, strained as it is, is likely to lead to substantial efforts toward construction of a homestead since the labour to do so is unavailable. Finally, the ideal of reasonable common residence is clearly impossible.

Socialization of children

The evidence suggests that the increasing rates of absenteeism have been associated with an increase in the number of children born out of wedlock and in the number of women bearing children by more than one man (Colclough and McCarthy, 1980:175). Unmarried mothers represented almost half of the female population 18 and over in Brown's Kgatleng District sample (Brown, 1980:11). The result is that many children are bound to grow without knowledge of a father and therefore without a necessary socializing agent. The father who is customarily the founder and legal head of his family and who must formerly recognize his children as his own at the time of birth, by giving them a name and providing for the mother during her confinement (Schapera, 1938:176) is, in many instances, permanently absent in a child's life. By being socialized in a fatherless context, the child is bound to come to accept fatherlessness and is likely to be engaged, as an adult, in behaviours which will perpetuate some form of father absenteeism. Instead of learning that father is someone who protects his children, and who helps to keep order and maintain discipline over his children, father becomes a vaguely remembered or unknown "man" who sends little to no money; who may occasionally visit, or who is simply best known to mother and is of no immediate significance to children. The absence of a father is not only economically burdensome to a mother, but denies the family an important element without which the definition of family becomes problematic.

Socio-economic advancement and community status enhancement

There is overwhelming evidence indicating that mine labour migration forms one of the major sources of income and employment in the lives of many poor families. Migrant labour forms one of Botswana's exports. Kerven (1980:18) reports that in 1976 and 1977 for example, the value of diamond exports was P37,49 and P48,46 million respectively. The value of meat exports in the same two years was from P43,00 million to P42,00 million. Total exports of commodities from Botswana amounted to P153,20 million. Earnings from migrant labour amounted to P36,90 million. Finally, the amount of earnings made by Botswana citizens in South Africa (68,99 million) was almost equal to the amount earned by citizens within Botswana (P71,47).

But while the above is true, it is also true that the majority of households in the rural areas have an income far below the poverty datum line for a household of a given size and composition (Rural Income Distribution Survey, 1976:95). Approximately three-quarters of the rural households have below average incomes. Furthermore, it is clear that rural incomes

are heavily skewed. The Rural Income Distribution Survey (1976) shows that in a random selection of countries including Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, India, Malawi, Tanzania, United Kingdom, U.S.A. and Zambia, etc. Botswana would fall in the group with the skewest income distribution.

The vicious cycle of poverty together with the iron cage of family underdevelopment go a long way to frustrating well-intended self-help efforts by families towards socio-economic advancement. Absenteeism, and with it, remote-control family-management are both economically and psychologically burdensome. In addition, mineworkers tend to be afflicted by diseases which are socially stigmatizing and as such are unlikely to enhance their image in the community. The main diseases stated in the National Development Plan IV were tuberculosis, respiratory diseases like pneumonia, acute bronchitis, cardiovascular diseases, enteritis, malignant diseases, accidents and injuries, measles and malaria. Together, these diseases accounted for 63.7% of all hospital deaths in 1976.

Social-psychological satisfaction

The needs that are usually taken as the starting point for motivation theory are usually referred to as physiological needs. These are said to be the most basic of all needs. It is unlikely that a family within the low socio-economic group will experience social-psychological satisfaction based on a general sense of family achievement when basic psychological needs are at best only barely met. Instead of psychological satisfaction, there is evidence of psychological disturbance. In 1976, the Lobatse mental Hospital had 888 inpatients, 490 of which were male and 398 female. These figures indicate that males tend to suffer mental disorders more than females. The facts are not surprising since it is the males who are usually totally removed from any contact with family for long periods. The same data show that out of 39 alcoholic psycholism cases, 43 were male while only 5 were female. Since we do not know how many of the males were at home and how many were away from home, it is difficult to make sweeping statements on the basis of these statistics. Again, however, the facts do not reject the idea that men are more likely to be engaged in wasteful and even self destructive spending on alcohol and other social ills. Ultimately, as men turn to alcohol to forget their troubles, and as women get involved in economically underproductive activities, the community is unlikely to progress. Several underdeveloped communities with little sense of pride in their own members are likely to perpetuate general underdevelopment and poor quality of life in the society as a whole.

Implications

Government is not unaware of the weakening and breaking down of the traditional family unit and the general decline in customary social responsibilities, nor is government less aware that the situation is caused by rural-urban migration. What is less clear is whether planners are aware that not only is there a

breakdown of the traditional family but a fading-away of a meaningful conception of family and family life even in a "modern" sense. Furthermore, although there has been a lot of money spent on the National Migration Studies, the National Development Plan does not devote much attention to mine labour migration nor to problems relating to the family. Kerven (1979:vi) notes that, although mine labour migration forms one of the major sources of income and employment in the lives of many Botswana families, in policy terms, it is often treated as marginal, peripheral or unimportant. "One has the sense," she wrote, "reading policy documents and discussing the issue with those in policy-making positions, that it is regarded as "regrettable but inevitable, when it is regarded at all." Attention is focused on rural development.

But government recognizes that rural development now appears harder to bring about. The Fourth National Development Plan (p.67) hoped to increase the output and productivity of the rural economy. But in a country with less than a million inhabitants and in which virtually everyone has strong links to a traditional village, and where customary law and customary sentiments are unlikely to be eroded in the foreseeable future, the role of the family as a viable economic unit cannot be overemphasized. Many of the efforts on rural innovations and rural development, etc., are unlikely to succeed and benefit the lot of the people as long as development efforts do not take the family as an object of serious concern and which is central to the development process itself. Concern with tapping the potential of women to improve the welfare of families that are only legally and theoretically constituted, but which in all practical terms can hardly be said to exist, are unlikely to change the lot of the poor. Even a legislation to establish juvenile rehabilitation centres will not, as the Fourth National Development Plan notes (p. 234), take away or diminish the ultimate responsibility of parents (not wives or husbands individually) and the community for the upbringing of children. Community development or village development is unlikely to be more than an organizational sub-unit of the Division of Social and Community Development in the Ministry of Local Government and Lands unless it takes the family as a core development unit which is capable of both being developed and ensuring sustained development.

Problems of the Middle and Upper Socio-economic Family Units

So far, it would appear, the elite are not affected by family disintegration, and it is true that there is a tendency, by intellectuals and bureaucrats to exclusively focus on the problems of the poor, forgetting their own. But in so far as separation of family members is concerned, no socio-economic group is left untouched in Botswana.

The intelligentsia (government officials, teachers, nurses, clerks, typists, etc.) are no less plagued with family disintegration than other members of society. They are equally caught up in the iron cage of family underdevelopment. Their problem, however, is not

caused by mine labour migration, although many of their less fortunate relatives are.

Separation of members of the family among middle and upper socio-economic groups is mainly caused by the very factors which contribute to their socio-economic status, namely, education and work.

Education

In order to be in the middle or upper socio-economic groups, some formal education is necessary. Policy makers and implementers as well as their assistants are educated people. Formal education is so important in African countries that the demand for more educational facilities (and the preparation of manpower to master constantly advancing technoeconomic development) is a consistently important issue in politics. The commitment of African leaders to educational expansion is not only a response to popular demand, but also a reflection of an ideology of social change which posits that education is the pre-eminent instrument for promoting desirable social and economic changes (Foster, 1962:183).

According to the Fourth National Development Plan (p. 101), education is seen as a key to development both for society and for individuals. For the individual, education is seen as the surest route to personal advancement. The Fifth National Development Plan (p. 100) notes that the principal aim of education is individual development of knowledge, skills and attitudes for self-fulfillment and the betterment of society. But no mention is made of betterment of family life yet it is ultimately the family (of orientation) in Tswana society from which an individual gets recognition in the community and not from his academic qualifications alone. Social identity is traced first to the family and only in addition do other factors make a difference. It is the educated son or daughter of "so and so," the educated mother or father of "so and so," who gives an *additional* sense of pride to a family. Individual pride and bureaucratic standing in an office without a reassuring stability of a family are of doubtful value in Tswana society.

The process of getting post-primary education involves long periods of absence from the family in boarding schools and universities. Even where a child attends school in the neighborhood, school work tends to take so much of his or her life that interaction with members of the family is minimal. It is believed that it is best not to disturb a school-going child with menial housework as this is likely to disturb his or her school work. In school, children are taught that they are future leaders — ministers, economists, doctors, lawyers, scientists, etc. In the five or so years at high school, they internalize attitudes and beliefs which are likely to lead to more schooling. Very little is taught them about how to be good fathers and mothers of tomorrow; how to raise good families and prepare a future for their own children. It is not surprising that there is so much family discord among enlightened members of society. There is no reason to believe that without any systematic exposure to family life and without any significant role-models in

their lives, young people can be expected to enter marriage with any expertise to run a family, especially a nuclear family with no elders to help and in which one of the main members (husband or wife) is likely to be away on study. The individualism that education enculcates does not benefit the collectivity orientation of family life. Those who go for higher level studies are even further taught to be individualistic, egoistic and more unlikely to want to yield to collectivity demands of the family.

Despite the individualism that we have portrayed, there appears to be an underlying attachment to the family by those who leave for school. Several informal observations of students studying abroad indicate that many tend to exhibit home-sickness behaviours which often involve disturbingly costly long-distance calls to members of their families. Instead of sending money home to improve the quality of their homes, or of the diet of their children, money is spent on transportation, communications, and other forms of psycho-emotional means of coping with "absenteeism." There is usually no provision by those who sponsor higher education for the family, and those who cannot "stand" the separation find that the efforts to be with one's family are inconsistent with the process of obtaining an education as well as with supporting a family.

At the end of one family member's course of education (say the husband's), it is often time for the other (the wife) to go away for several months to a few years in pursuit of further studies. Education is desired by each individual separately, because it promises job advancement and membership in the middle class. Because they have been socialized to believe in education, middle and upper socio-economic groups are likely to put educational advancement as the single most important factor in life enrichment, and are likely also to put this over and above other aspects of family life resulting in late marriage and/or a problematic family life.

Work

But even where families are not likely to be separated because the wife or husband has gone to school, they are often separated by the fact that their expertise are required in separate parts of the country. Government policy clearly states that those individuals who are fortunate enough to receive post-primary education incur an obligation to the society that has educated them. This is given practical expression in the bonding system, which requires the recipients of state-subsidized training to serve the state for an initial period after graduating (National Development Plan, 1976-1981:101). Even without the bond, virtually all members of society who have any education, skill or semi-skill, are "forced" to go where their knowledge or skill is most needed for development. Thus, as civil servants, teachers, nurses, not excluding top government bureaucrats, are located and relocated all over the country (away from their families) to man development projects; hospitals; schools; district

offices; agricultural stations, they are all "forced" to contribute to the underdevelopment of their own families and of future agents of development — their children.

The separation of family members tends to result in behaviours which are generally counterproductive, irreputable or simply unacceptable within a family context. Furthermore, such behaviours have often led to scandalous outrages which when they have afflicted a teacher, a nurse, an officer, etc., tend to reduce his productivity. A scandal will affect an officer's ability to use the prestige and authority of his office to get things done. Some of the other officers may use such a moment of personal weakness and social embarrassment to undermine his authority which may develop into unforeseen and unnecessary poor working conditions. The result of all this is that much of the effort to improve the lot of the poor will become distorted and caught up in the crossfire and resonance of office politics. The point is, family related problems have an effect on the performance of an individual at work.

We have probably overemphasized the importance of the family to national development. But as long as the local intelligentsia can look around to see how well family needs are catered for among their expatriate counterparts, and how their initiative to be with their families is frustrated, they are likely to continue to work with low morale and therefore low productivity.

An additional problem of the intelligentsia, especially among teachers and nurses, is that it becomes extremely difficult to establish a home in a given town or village since they cannot own the "quarters" they live in, and the likelihood of being transferred irrespective of seniority makes it uneconomic for anyone of them to establish a homestead with the intent of settling down in a specific locality. This makes it difficult to plan one's family and may add to the general feelings of helplessness and the inevitability of a problematic family life even where problems of faithfulness to one's spouse are minimal or non-existent.

Ultimately the legal union of man and woman plus their offspring is difficult to establish and when established, difficult to maintain. Secondly, economic cooperation with a view to constructing a homestead for the purpose of settling down and raising a family is also problematic and generally only partially achieved. Thirdly, the socialization of children as a means of preparing them for the future is virtually impossible. Fourthly, a sense of personal socio-economic advancement as well as community-status enhancement is weakened. Fifthly, social-psychological satisfaction based on a general sense of achievement derived from the family and a sense of belongingness and companionship within the smallest legally constituted social unit, is bound to be low.

If as we have suggested, the intelligentsia — the group that is expected to lead in national development by participating at all levels in the implementation of national policy, and even defining the policies, are

so heavily caught up, as we have suggested, in an iron cage of underdevelopment of their own families, this will have a negative effect on their ability to effectively contribute to national development.

Conclusions

Lincoln Hanada and Olson (1981) suggest that Japanese tend to rate their company time as equal in importance to their private (family) lives, to the extent that they feel that company management should advise subordinates on such highly personal matters as a decision to marry. Perhaps the great success of Japanese industry can be attributed, among other important factors, to their taking interest in the needs of the worker and his family.

But even those who are persuaded by our analysis should be reminded that any theory, even when persuasive, is in one respect or other, a simplification of reality. In our attempts to explain the intricacies of social, psychological, economic, cultural, political and historical processes which impinge upon, shape or even limit certain types of development, we put on conceptual eyeglasses or barriers which colour what we see and limit our vision. Our analysis is no less limited by our philosophical orientations, epistemological underpinnings and methodological knowledge and preferences, as is the case with any social product, whether it be a theory of development, a consumer item, or a work of art.

We have presented here one man's version of a cycle of events which we believe, in spite of the tremendous and commendable development efforts which have so far been made under the direction and genius of those who initiated and guided independence, and who changed the gloomy picture of 1966 to rapid economic growth and unquestionably vivid development all over the country, are likely to result in an internally less impressive socio-economic development picture. Our analysis, rather than being a definitive statement on national development, or for that matter underdevelopment of the family, is intended to be a springboard for debate. Whatever the nature of the arguments, it is hoped that our analysis will generate constructive research into the role that the family as a unit plays in matters affecting national development. If our analysis is to be meaningful, future work should investigate the extent to which there exists a cycle of underdevelopment which at first involves the physical separation of family members and leads to behaviours that result in counterproductive or uneconomic methods of family management. Further investigation should identify the extent to which separated family members make efforts to contact and support their family; the extent to which they expend potential family income on transportation and communications with the family, the extent to which remote control methods of running a family cause great personal frustration and the extent to which marital breakdown is an overall result of families being separated due to work or school; the extent to which psychoadaptive techniques to separation from family is likely to result in excessive use of intoxicants and result in other psychopathologies, and the extent to which poor

attitudes towards work and low productivity are related to absenteeism from the family, etc., and how all this relates to socio-economic development.

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