

Towards A Community Involvement Framework for Remote Area Communities in Botswana

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Abstract: *The overarching aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which remote area communities can be involved in Botswana. Specifically, the study examined how the Khwai community could be actively engaged in social and economic development efforts that address their livelihood, needs and interests. The ultimate aim of this investigation will be to provide strategic consultation which would align community tasks with predetermined goals and missions for the Basarwa community in the Khwai village in Botswana where data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews which were administered through a semi-structured questionnaire. The following recommendations are made by this study: (1) There is a need for an inclusive participation of community members and, as such, the introduction of appropriate communication approaches or consultation methods is imperative (2) There are financial benefits which contribute to the sustainability of livelihoods; these are attained through natural resources (wildlife), which result from the people of Khwai's community involvement with their local environment (3) A market for the tourism products for the Khwai community is needed since the research established that the community have an insignificant benefits in their local area (4) The paper further recommends community capacity building, since the community has now been introduced to commercial life.*

Keywords: involvement, engagement, consultations, community participation, strategic communication, development communication, governance

INTRODUCTION

Citizens play an important part in decision-making processes that affect their community welfare. That being the case, this study sought to evaluate the Botswana Government's community involvement approaches when implementing community service delivery programmes for remote area dwellers such as the Basarwa (The San), who are a marginalised ethnic group in Botswana. An assessment of community - government consultation processes was undertaken to establish the impact of the Botswana Government Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) on the livelihoods of the Basarwa. Subsequently, a theoretical contribution in the form of a conceptual framework that could strengthen the initiatives aimed at empowering and capacitating individuals, families and communities of the Basarwa and other remote area communities was developed.

With a view to the above, communication in the context of this study was used as a yardstick to measure the effective policy-making and public participation for particular community services and government developmental programmes. Communication, therefore, does not only help open up new ideas on sustainability and how policy is formulated, but also exposes issues that need to be addressed. From this perspective, the needs and values of the communities can be enshrined in the decision-making processes with the purpose of creating community empowering opportunities.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This study is underpinned by the theoretical concept of *community involvement*. Ackerman (2003) and Gauthier (2011) argue that community involvement, through participation, is one of the main objectives of democratic governments in order to achieve more open, transparent, efficient and effective government.

Community involvement which bears some similarities to *community engagement* is viewed as a process that promotes empowerment with a commitment towards forms of collaboration, involving under-resourced and marginalised communities (Dempsey, 2010). Adamson and Bromley (2013:2) argue that community engagement is a process whereby public bodies reach out to communities to create empowerment opportunities. When addressing the collaborative relationships for the development of the Basarwa's livelihood, it is also crucial to take the community's priorities into account as a way of increasing opportunities for engagement. The community should therefore be engaged as part of the community involvement process. This can be achieved by giving the Basarwa an opportunity to participate in social, economic and environmental matters that affect their community's livelihoods.

The term "community" can have a variety of meanings ranging from neighbourhoods and organisations to larger (even global) collectives (Kadushinet *et al.*, 2005). Community engagement and participation of local people in Community Development (CD) initiatives to provide basic services which affect their daily lives, represents the core principle of bottom-up, people-oriented development. It is contended that an autonomous model of empowering community members from acting as mere spectators to active citizens can build community resilience, and capability for sustainable community development endeavours, which respond appropriately to livelihood concerns, and community needs.

A related concept is *community participation* which refers to the involvement of people and organisations in the process of policy-making and implementation (Feldman *et al.*, 2007:306). Mayo and Craig (2004) (in Alexiu *et al.*, 2011:6) provide a World Bank definition of community participation as a "means for ensuring that the Third World development projects reach the poorest in the most efficient and cost-effective way, sharing costs as well as benefits, through the promotion of self-help". This definition suits the objective of this study which primarily focused on the involvement of the Basarwa (San) who constitute one of the poorest communities in Botswana who need social and developmental uplifting.

Community involvement can lead to effective participation in decision-making processes that provides strategic consultation that would align community tasks with predetermined goals and missions. This is carried out in regards to various aspects pertaining to the implementation of developments or

programmes undertaken by the Botswana Government. This study therefore explored the potential of the involvement of the Basarwa or the Khwai community in the Botswana Government consultation processes with the purpose of developing communication strategies for their particular community service programmes. Despite the benefits of public engagement as a platform for the voices of the poorer and marginalised, various governments at times do not adequately provide effective community service delivery that addresses the community needs or even fail to provide supportive capacity building interventions that would enable the community to self-help themselves. The World Bank put much emphasis on and encourages efforts that are geared towards stimulating and providing a supportive assurance for efforts that would benefit the poorest and at the same time promoting self-help interventions. Cammack P (2004)

With a view to the above, this study therefore argues that it is necessary to create relationships with the poor and marginalised citizens who, largely, do not have easy access to service provision and community engagement activities (Brackeertz, *et al.*, 2005, in Robyn Eversole, 2011:54). According to Lamp and Mcdee's (2004:37), good community citizenship participation could help develop and support a higher quality of life. This reiterates the power of public participation that could lead to better livelihoods. The same analogy is shared by Claridge (2004), who is of the view that if people are committed to a shared activity with the community, it expands their network and boosts social skills.

Participatory development

Participation means involving local people in the development of plans and activities designed to change their lives. In its most developed form, participation is a continuous process of negotiation and decision-making that occurs at various levels and with all stakeholders (Chambers, 1992:8). Participation is the process through which the stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making and resource allocation (Gregory, 2000:179).

Participatory development goes hand in hand with social sustainability because for effective community development, all three dimensions of social sustainability must be addressed to attain the most sustainable outcome possible.

The involvement of local communities in decisions that affect their lives makes development more effective, and it does have the potential to change the way poor people are engaged in their individual and community development, which subsequently gives them voice and agency (World Bank, 2012). Through participatory development, there is community and citizen capacity enhancement in the management of their local affairs and a better interaction with the authorities (Muhammad, 2015).

In order to ascertain how successful a participatory development programme is, one should be clear what others mean by 'participation', as well as have a personal conception of what you understand by it.

Metatheory

In order to establish the underlying theory that underpinned the other theories mentioned in this research, the metatheory identified in this study is the *integrative strategic communication management theory* whose main concepts included sustainability, governance, strategy, communication, stakeholder relationships and corporate reputation. These concepts provided guidance

for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the terms in this study. De Beer (2014) states in the development of her substantive theory of the conceptualisation of strategic communication management in the triple context environment of people, planet and profit, that reflective stewardship is important for managers to consider in their leadership and management responsibilities. This form of stewardship is supported by various functional and process capabilities that intervene in effectiveness and efficiency, including communication, messages, mutually beneficial stakeholder relationship management, and interaction with a focus on conversation, dialogue and listening. Reflective stewardship also enables a good corporate (or in this case, country) reputation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The specific research questions below provided a framework around which all the data could be modelled.

The primary research question was:

How can the Basarwa community in the Khwai village of Botswana be actively engaged and involved in the social and economic development efforts that address their livelihood, needs and interests?

The secondary research questions were as follow:

RQ 1: How can the Basarwa community in the Khwai Village of Botswana be involved in decision-making about the sustainable development of their livelihoods, particularly in the Moremi Game Reserve?

RQ 2: Can the inclusive approach to governance be considered for the governing of the Basarwa community in the Khwai village of Botswana?

RQ 3: How can the Basarwa community in the Khwai Village of Botswana be involved in decision-making contributing to the strategic management of their livelihoods in their local environment, particularly the Moremi Game Reserve?

RQ 4: What factors led to a lack of local community engagement and communication in natural resource management, especially with regard to wildlife resources?

RQ 5: What factors should be considered to achieve community involvement of the Basarwa in the Khwai village of Botswana?

RQ 6: How does the dispute about the future of the Basarwa community in the Khwai Village of Botswana affect the reputation of the country?

METHODOLOGY

An ethnographic approach was used concurrently with other qualitative research methodological approaches in order to obtain rich data essential for this study. Interviews conducted with 17 participants, were administered through a semi-structured questionnaire.

Leedy and Ormrod (2013:140) indicate that a qualitative research method enables a researcher to analyse the underlying theoretical concepts regarding consultative processes and can be used in community engagement and service delivery. The method may also enable testing the validity of certain assumptions, claims and theories, or generalisation within a real-world context. This would in a way solidify the aspect of verification which can be achieved when adopting the usage of qualitative research.

In the current study qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. This involved identifying and then classifying the patterns in the data. Thematic analysis is a research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified themes within a text (Neuendorf, 2002). Wilson (1993:342) describes thematic analysis as a data analysis technique used in phenomenological inquiry that involves data from interviews with participants to discover themes or categories of experiences as seen from the participants' perspectives. According to Aronson (1994:1), thematic analysis allows for patterns of experiences to be listed from the transcribed conversations, which usually come from direct quotes or paraphrasing of common ideas. Thematic analysis provides a clear guideline on how to sense themes, the first step in analysing information, as well as how to develop quotes, through the use of numerous examples from the use of settings (Boyatzis, 1998). A conceptual framework was developed after the dataset was analysed.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The findings of this study guided by the research questions yielded the sub-themes below that address the involvement of the Khwai community of the Basarwa by the Botswana Government, in the consultation processes in areas such as wildlife tourism utilisation and management.

1. Involvement in sustainable development:

The findings show that the people of Khwai did not have any major policy-making function regarding wildlife and natural *resource* management in the Moremi Game Reserve. This contributed to a lack of sustainability of livelihoods of the Khwai community. On the other hand, the policy makers, for example the wildlife officer, argued that the resettlement of the Khwai community away from the Moremi Game Reserve to the current settlement was done to involve them tourism development and wildlife management. Although the resettlement limited the Basarwa (San) access to wildlife and to veld products it introduced them to commercial life and that has made them show delight in other agricultural interventions such as cattle rearing.

2. Involvement in financial Development:

The findings of this study further indicate that the community saw tourism as a business source, as depicted from various viable community projects in the area which include: walking safaris conducted by the local community, cultural tourism, and provision of community escort guides and non-consumptive tourist projects such as photographic tourism and related tourist spin-off projects like a craft industry and a bakery. These projects are appropriate for the Khwai village. It should however be noted that capacity building that is offered in the form of training and resource provision, in some cases as a startup for the community business establishment, often does not have continuity; it is only carried out as a once-off phenomenon. There is also evidence that lack of inspiration hinders the youth

in the community to undertake business, pursue studies or to work. Free allowances from the Government also deters the youth from pursuing worthwhile engagements.

As highlighted by the above findings, lack of a direct share of the revenue generated by the Moremi Game Reserve, particularly entrance fees and employment opportunities in the parks and lodges, creates conflicts which result in a barrier to community involvement. This does not reflect well on natural resource management and other matters involving the community.

3. Involvement in social development

It is important for the community to be involved early in the planning process of a project. This involvement should be continuous and have the ultimate purpose of completing the whole process of the project. An example could be regarding the development of the plan or consultations about the draft plan for the envisaged developmental project. The low levels of community *involvement* may be pronounced as advocated by Alman (2013), who postulates that the process of decision-making is reliant upon the social, economic and political power of groups within the society.

4. Involvement in environmental development

The participants in this study stated that the Government never consulted or involved them in making wildlife management laws in relation to wildlife management in their area. They further noted that Government officials informed them at meetings of such wildlife laws or policies only when they were just about to be implemented. The example which the people of Khwai gave is that of the establishment of protected areas of Chobe National Park and Moremi Game Reserve and the extension of the park boundaries into their communal land. It is evident that community participation in tourism development through the Community – Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programme creates income and employment opportunities for the people of the Khwai Village.

Improvement of socio-economic well-being of rural households is an incentive for attracting and sustaining local support for nature conservation and tourism development (Mugizi *et al.*, 2018). There is a two-way view: the Government of Botswana and the Private Sector interest groups see the Okavango delta's wildlife resources as a potential source of wealth for safari hunting and tourism photography. On the other hand, the Basarwa see the Okavango delta as their source of livelihood, and thereby mostly depend on it as a resource for veld products found in the area. This somehow contributes to conflict and competition over resource use and service users.

5. Involvement in governance

The findings of this study showed that the community members, as well as decision-makers, were concerned about the top-down approach that the Botswana Government has adopted. Much as this being the case, this study advocates for a public participation approach that embraces a bottom-up process to formulate policies for the purpose of community development that can actively involve the participants in decision-making and to better facilitate the achievement of their targeted objectives (Shackleton *et. al.*, 2002). Communities do not always have to rely on their governments to take a lead in order for them to be provided services that serve their needs and aspirations (Burs & Aplin, 1999:519). Baru and Kjaer (2008) share the same sentiments when stating that it is necessary for citizens to interact with diverse groups outside government.

Although it is important for the top-down approach to be used by the Government or authority for the purposes of central planning, the fear is that some decisions taken without consultations may result in a negative perception towards the Botswana Government's efforts. It is necessary to adopt a bottom-up approach for the involvement of the Basarwa community, which is initiated and managed by the community for the community.

6. Involvement in strategic management

The study further found that there was poor communication or lack thereof between the community and decision-makers. It is possible that the information disseminated to the community was hampered by barriers such as misunderstanding or the manner in which the information was packaged. This study therefore argues that it is necessary to create relationships with the Basarwa community because they are poorest and marginalised citizens of Botswana (Brackeertz, et al. (2005) in Robyn Eversole, 2011:54). Communication is the key component of sustainable development, hence the effect of successful public engagement will depend on the effectiveness of the communication strategies developed and applied for the involvement of the marginalised citizens.

The Khwai village has a strong traditional institution organised through the *kgotla* or the ward system to enable the effective implementation of community-based projects. The village also has strong village development committees (VDCs), which have a great deal of influence and experience in community affairs including the CBNRM programme.

7. Involvement in development and participatory communication

The findings of this study show that the communication processes through which the Botswana Government engages with the Basarwa were ineffective. The interviewed community participants stated that they were never accorded a chance to appreciate what was put forward to them and, therefore, there is a lack of understanding and clarity about what is communicated to them. Furthermore, the situation became even more difficult because some meetings were too short to allow issues under discussion to be thoroughly processed, especially by the community. This supports the notion that education, income level, and occupational skills have an impact on the performance of community development projects. The Basarwa's level of education and social status demand an approach that would enable them to understand what is put forward to them.

8. Involvement in country reputation

Furthermore, this study revealed a two-way view of community involvement by the community and the Government. The Government of Botswana and the Private Sector interest groups see the Okavango delta's wildlife *resources* as a potential source of wealth for safari hunting and tourism photography. On the other hand, the Basarwa see the Okavango delta as their source of livelihood, thereby being mostly dependent on the delta's resources and veld products found in the area. This somehow contributes to conflict and competition over *resource* use and service users.

DISCUSSIONS

The above mentioned themes were used to develop a community involvement conceptual framework that addresses the research problem. This was done in an attempt to understand the participants' perspectives and views of social realities for the purpose of investigating decision-making regarding the local community of Khwai village. The findings provide the participants' perceptions and

experiences from their own perspective about the decision-making process involving the people of Khwai village. Through addressing the research questions, the daily experiences, and perspectives of the participants in the decision-making process were highlighted.

An assessment government communication approached amongst many indicated that there are several other benefits which the Khwai community obtained from their involvement in the decision-making process in their local environment. These benefits include the following: business, entrepreneurship, CBNRM benefit and access to land and parks, the community-based natural resource management benefit, wildlife activities, right to farm, ecosystem (human natural habitat), stakeholder input, usage of wildlife products, thatching resource business and poles for lodges' construction (lodge owners as potential buyers). The sustainability of projects depends on the *resources* and availability of funds, amongst others. Remote area dwellers, like the Khwai community, rely mostly on the social security schemes provided by the state. The majority, if not all, receive destitute rations and allowance. Other social safety nets provided include the old age pension scheme, assistance for orphans and vulnerable children and services for people who are on home-based care.

This study further showed that through the CBNRM, communities derive income and employment opportunities from tourism development. However, a lot depends on Trusts which are tasked with empowering individual or group projects of community members through Trust money. The generation of income and employment opportunities that is seen to be evidently benefiting the community members, and providing some form of income and employment generation avenues, have associated benefits from CBNRM that include the following: income benefits, individual empowerment, employment, income opportunities, jobs, employment generation, welfare improvement, business, traditional artefacts, cultural singing and access to land. However, this study observed that the community engagement regarding EDD should take into consideration entrepreneurship, the individual and fragmentation of the needs of the community. All of these point to the need to review the current community engagement consultative processes with the purpose of developing an appropriate communication strategy for effective developmental interventions.

Sheehy-Skeffington (2017) emphasises lower confidence displayed by people with low socio-economic status; that they do not only often see themselves less able to learn new skills and able to successfully complete tasks, but also less likely perceive that their actions will affect how their lives turn out. Therefore, the less people think that their action matter, the less likely they are to make their choices aligned to achieving their future goals. The above observation is also applicable to the Basarwa community village. The marginalized Basarwa communities do not have enough confidence to engage with the policy makers at *kgotla* meetings and often regard the Government as only a provider of free services while they, in turn, portray an attitude of continuous dependency as seen in most developing countries.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Research implications reflect that resource conflicts occur at ground level between local communities and wildlife managers, amongst others. This is coupled with too much conflict of interest, e.g., among local influential people like politicians, often manipulates the running of the projects.

Community involvement processes, put in place by the Government of Botswana through the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), lack strategies that can develop the Basarwa communities in Botswana, but more specifically the Basarwa community in the Khwai village, on matters of their social and economic empowerment. The conservation of wildlife resources at the Moremi Game Reserve is an endeavour by the Botswana Government to promote tourism in the Reserve.

The findings of this study indicate that community leadership of the Khwai community have a minimal impact on the decision-making process. This implies that Basarwa communities being marginalized and somehow poor, seem not to have the self-esteem and self-confidence to engage with the policy makers at *kgotla* meetings as they see the Government as “a provider of free services”; while the community members themselves portray an attitude of continuous dependence as seen in most developing countries.

Specifically the implications of the study research are as follows:

I) Involvement in governance

As deduced from this research, participants felt that the bottom-up approach should be advocated for matters regarding community involvement in decision-making. As expressed by the people on grassroots level, it is deemed of utmost importance for the purposes of governance and developmental programme implementation to initiate effective and more inclusive communication initiatives. For this purpose, the strategic communication management for governance initiatives should consider community feedback on governmental development programmes. Efforts such as annual general meetings that are held by Trust Development Associations, provides an opportunity for the community to voice their needs and concerns; and auditors share their budget and advise which community individuals to assist and which community projects to embark upon. However, the forums of this nature do not benefit the community as there is a lack of participation. Feedback is essential for inclusive community participation. The Botswana Government, as the service provider, can seek community views about the aspirations and values as well as concerns by soliciting feedback. Hence the decision-makers can be better informed to deal with the community needs.

It is, therefore, vital for the community to be given feedback essential for inclusive community participation. This study noted that livelihood sustainability programmes of the Basarwa failed to achieve what both the Botswana Government and the Basarwa community endeavoured to fulfil.

II) Strategic decision-making

Currently there are no suitable NGOs focusing on wildlife conservation, who can facilitate the implementation of community-based wildlife projects. Although the Botswana Government tends to design programmes that benefit local communities and alleviate poverty, the findings of this study indicate that there is still a lack of effective and appropriate strategic interventions that could drive the service delivery of the community development efforts of the Botswana Government. A similar concern was raised by the Botswana Institute of Development Policy that Botswana’s development efforts are crippled by a lack of effective communication strategies.

The demand for the effectiveness of social development provision by the community necessitates a drastic step that involves long-term strategic planning, and therefore, appropriate methods of community engagement should be utilised based on the current trends. To this regard, strategic communication and management should encompass participatory planning opportunities to ensure active involvement and direct participation of the community in the implementation of Government developmental programmes, specifically in an endeavour to promote the participation of marginalised societies of the remote dweller communities.

III) Project implementation methods

The findings of this study further show that sustainability was also addressed through some interventions implemented in conjunction with Government development programmes such as CBNRM. The findings show that the CBNRM was implemented to run alongside other Government development programmes for sustainability, to provide social provision and control with the purpose of presenting an opportunity to facilitate rural development. Issues of sustainability are addressed through this intervention. This, in a way, shows some success in that it helps to confirm local expectations and the desires of policy makers.

Though decisions such as the implementation of the CBNRM programme often take place through a top-down decision-making process, such as the one undertaken by policy makers, there is evidence that service providers are currently addressing community needs, which is noticed to have taken place in various regions. The CBNRM programme is yielding great benefits and there have been some financial returns. This is supported by one study showing the good results regionally, indicating: Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia (Venter & Been, 1998).

Furthermore, there is an indication that the Basarwa community are living a sustainable life in that some of the developments that are taking place in the village, like water connection for community households, are as a result of an effective political representation through the local counsellor. The current study established that, although there were limited job opportunities created through the tourism and hospitality activities in the area, there was evidence that financial benefits could result in viable social developments that positively impact on the livelihoods of Basarwa communities. One villager appreciated the fact that other residents from outside Khwai, worked and stay within their community because of tourism and hospitality related job opportunities in the area.

IV) Less community interest

The *kgotla* consultation process, as shown by the findings of this study, is not effective. Mr Ray Molomo indicated that *kgotla* meetings, although regarded as a cultural phenomenon, were predominantly used by the Botswana Government to rubber stamp public policies. Extant literature shows that the form of consultation where rubber stamping or endorsing readymade decisions falls short of being open and transparent (John *et al.*, 2013:83). The current study argues that *Kgotla* meetings should instead allow the community to voice any concerns with a particular project, and to find applicable solutions that can resolve issues raised by community members. Therefore, simply conducting a *kgotla* meeting is not sufficient for community involvement. Consultation meetings should initiate processes and approaches of participation that are clear and define the levels of achievement throughout the development of the project.

To illustrate the lack of participation by local communities in the decision-making process, the participants noted that: *“there is poor governance in terms of the CBNRM programme”, “there is little or no consultation. However, the Village Development Committees (VDC), allow members to be elected or elect other community members as part of the VDC. This provides evidence that the inclusive governance approach can be considered for the governing of the Khwai community”*.

While the *kgotla* forum was ideally created to allow for community participation in the decision-making process, the findings of this study show that it is characterised by lack of local community involvement in the decision-making process on natural resource management in their local environment, particularly at the Moremi Game Reserve. The findings further indicate that the *kgotla* is the main form of consultation although there are other channels that can be utilised.

Another observation made by this study is that *kgotla* meetings do not provide a useful consultation environment because they are normally not conducted in a coordinated manner. The findings show that community members destroy meeting documents issued to them at the end of meetings, probably because they are illiterate or cannot read. This study therefore suggests that colourful graphically illustrated and an interesting form of material should be provided for those who cannot read.

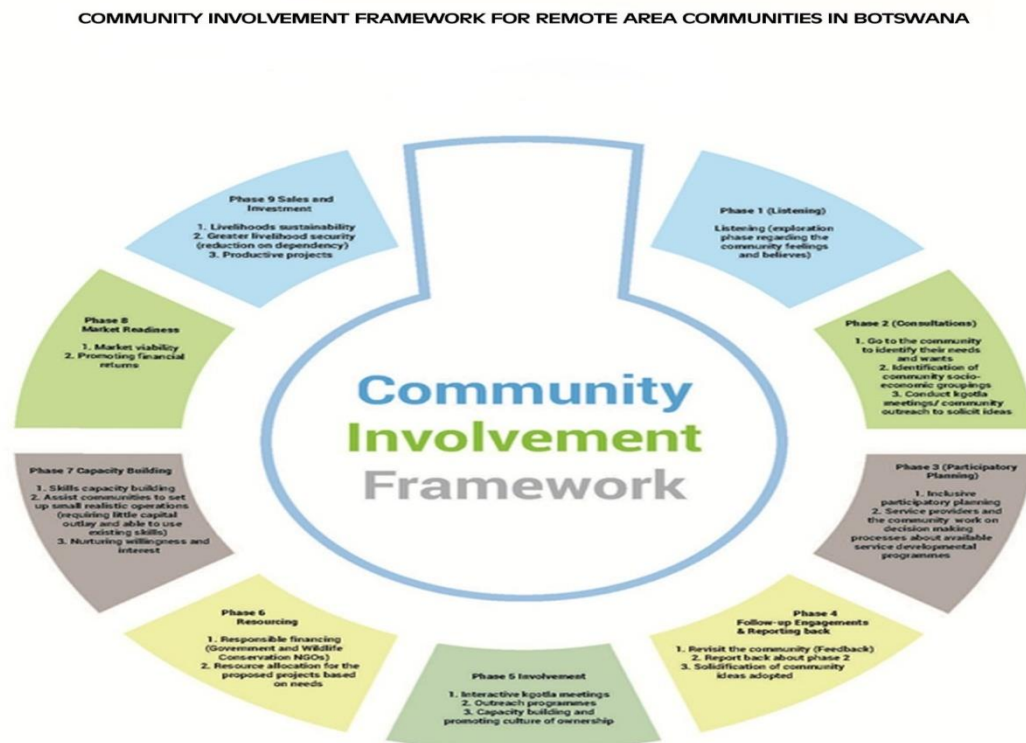
Previous literature confirm the argument that Government consultation in *kgotla* meetings is done for the purpose of rubber stamping readymade decisions. Hitchcock (2019 and Mbaiwa (2005) found that the Basarwa in Botswana and Southern Africa do not play any major role in policy-making regarding wildlife utilisation and management in their respective areas. Policies are formulated at the centre and government officials disseminate information to the local people through the *kgotla* about how such wildlife policies and laws should be implemented. The fact that local communities are mostly not involved in wildlife policy formulation suggests that they often do not have control over land and wildlife resources.

Hitchcock (2019 and Mbaiwa (2005) argue that an inclusive approach is imperative to involve marginalised community members to accord them a sense of confidence and self-worth. The current study established that there is currently little or no inclusive participatory planning in remote areas in Botswana. The development projects are brought to the community without their input. This, in a way, brings about a total failure on matters of inclusive governance on the part of the Government. This study argues that it is of paramount importance to appreciate that a bottom-up approach would be the most suitable, specifically if carried out before decisions are taken, as this will ensure adequate consultation. This, therefore, can result in the idea of social exclusion which, in a way, has conceptual connections with well-established notions in the literature on poverty and deprivation (Sen, 2000). It can therefore be concluded that this ongoing social exclusion, poverty and deprivation will continue to take place until such a time when the inclusive governance approach is used, that would take cognisance of the community needs and wants by incorporating them into community development plans. From this perspective, it is essential for the Botswana Government to select appropriate linkage mechanisms and governance arrangements.

The findings of this study further showed that despite the fact that the Botswana Government has programmes in place designed to benefit local communities and alleviate poverty there is a lack of effective and appropriate strategic communication interventions that could drive the service delivery

of the Botswana Government's community development efforts in general, which seems to be the view of various reports by public bodies on the matter.

The current study therefore derived a *Community Involvement Framework for Remote Area Communities in Botswana* as reflected in the diagram below. This framework proposes how the Khwai community can be appropriately involved.



Source: Author's own depiction

The proposed *Community Involvement Framework for Remote Area Communities in Botswana*, comprises of nine phases which were formulated to achieve community involvement in the formulation of policy decisions that play an important part in the livelihoods of the Basarwa.

The nine phases are namely;

- I. Listening
- II. Consultation
- III. Participatory planning
- IV. Follow-up engagements and reporting
- V. Involvement

- VI. Resources
- VII. Capacity building
- VIII. Market readiness
- IX. Livelihood sustainability

Listening phase involves not just hearing but achieving mutual understanding on development matters. **Consultation** refers to providing an opportunity for the community to express their views; and during the **participatory planning** phase the community is engaged and informed about available service providers and development programmes. Through **capacity building** it is essential to ensure that the communities are empowered to implement the community plan. Revisiting the community to inform them on what transpired during the participatory planning session takes place during **follow-up engagements and reporting back**. During **involvement**, the people are educated on the community plan, with the purpose of inculcating a culture of ownership. **Resources** are vital towards bringing relevant answers to the social welfare and developmental programmes geared towards developing livelihoods of the community. Therefore, issues of **sustainability** are addressed through this intervention. This, in a way, shows some success in that it helps in conforming local expectations and the desires of policy makers. **Market readiness** is when existing skills and realistic operations need to be emphasised during this phase.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that control and access to utilisation values should be given to the users who, in this case, include the local communities and other stakeholders in the wildlife industry. Barnes (1998) states that decentralisation of wildlife resources to district and local community levels is vital in that it empowers landholders to take control of the resources and manage them so as to maximise returns - a situation which will oblige them to use wildlife resources sustainably.

The findings of this study suggest that the Basarwa will still live a dependent life and fail to effectively carry out activities that generate income for their livelihood unless they are full involved in community development. Currently efforts to empower them are limited to imparting new skills and receiving food rations. Since the Khwai community does not have an effective functioning market for their tourism products, they currently have insignificant benefits in their local area. Studies (e.g. Mbaiwa, 2008; Chambers, 1993) the Basarwa communities are poverty stricken and degrade the environment. The Central Statistics bureau notes that poverty in these districts is widespread (CSO 2008) and indicates that poverty headcount in western Okavango stands at 50–60%. This, therefore, shows that the current approach, which lacks an effective community involvement programme in resource management, contributes to poverty in the area. This solidifies the fact that it would keep the Basarwa living in continuous poverty. Once there is poverty, there is a likelihood of environmental degradation and wildlife poaching, which could lead to conflict between wildlife and tourism authorities.

The findings of this study have revealed that current reporting by local authorities focuses more on funds allocations dispatched to individuals or group community members. The current study recommends implementation of the AA 1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard of 2011 which will achieve inclusivity that will determine the approach and method of engagement, establish indicators

and meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs because it demands new and innovative choices and ways of thinking.

This study further recommends that the community involvement exercise should by all means avoid treating the members of target groups as needy or vulnerable, but rather as team members and as equal members of the society within the community. If this is not carried as such, it will result in the idea of social exclusion, which, in a way, has conceptual connections with well-established notions in the literature on poverty and deprivation (Sen, 2000). Furthermore the continuation of this ongoing social exclusion, poverty and deprivation will continue to take place until such a time when inclusive governance can be implemented, that would take cognisance of community needs and wants by incorporating them into the community development plans. Against the above background, it is essential for the Botswana Government to select appropriate linkage mechanisms and governance arrangements.

Another observation by this study is that the Basarwa, do not utilize the work tools they have been given to earn a living. Instead, they sell the tools to raise money to buy alcohol. Therefore, effectiveness of the development and implementation of the government social welfare programmes can only take place if resources are adequately provided to address the above mentioned problem.

This paper calls upon the Khwai community leaders and Botswana Government to make efforts to ensure that the community is enlightened on what to do in relation to community involvement in development projects. This study has observed that the community members do not find a need to work as almost all get destitute allowances and Trust fund allowances and these allowances become a disincentive for them to engage or get involved in income generating projects which are geared towards developing them financially and economically. Their interests in tourism and wildlife ventures are then not realized, as they are distracted by Trust and government handouts.

The Botswana Government recognises that the conditions of some citizens, specifically those in remote areas, are socio-economically worse than those of the mainstream ones. Hence, the Government has put in place developmental programmes geared towards promoting the sustainable socio-economic development of remote area dwellers. It is, however, of paramount importance for the Government to show a willingness to learn from the Basarwa community what their needs are, instead of assuming that they know what the community needs. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of community involvement programmes, communication should be seen as a necessary tool. Specialists such as adult educators and public relations officers should be capacitated with relevant communication skills commensurate with the nature of the existing or future assignments.

The current low levels of involvement may be pronounced as advocated by Alman (2013), who postulates that the process of decision-making is reliant upon the social, economic and political power of groups within the society. The marginalized Basarwa communities do not seem to have the self-esteem to engage with the policy makers at *kgotla* meetings, as they see the Government as only a provider of free services. They portray an attitude of continuous dependency as seen in most developing countries. Efforts that could build their self-esteem and confidence should be incorporated as part of their personal development process. Capacity-building could enhance a positive attitude

towards their participation in decision-making and problem-solving. This study found a highly suitable quote to support this aspect by Eyben (2011) which is stated below:

“Empowerment happens when individuals and organized groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realize that vision by changing the relations of power that have kept them in poverty, restricted their voice and deprived them of their autonomy.”

Therefore, empowering the Basarwa community can go a long way towards nurturing how they view life, how they imagine things and subsequently they would wear a new coat that can change their living environment.

Future Research

This study proposes that the Basarwa community of the Khwai village in Botswana should be involved in their community development and decision-making processes about land, so that their needs, interests and concerns can be taken into consideration. The developmental programmes of the Botswana Government in their current status do not provide the Basarwa with sustainable livelihoods. The research further contributes to new knowledge as follows:

- I. There is a need to contribute to the research on African countries’ practice of public relations, which has been limited (Tindall *et al.*, 2011:373), and it serves as a basis for potential communication strategy tools for future research and development.
- II. The study realised that there is limited evidence of research on African countries’ practices on strategic developmental communication and it has contributed to this body of knowledge by formulating a new framework.
- III. There is a need to build conceptual frameworks and strategies towards improving accountability of African governments in social development.

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