

Poverty Reduction in the Face of Climate Change: The Case of Women in The Rural Eastern Part of Botswana

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Abstract

Poverty reduction is not a preserve for the policy and decision makers only. It is a concern among the poor who by any means come up with local adaptation and mitigation strategies. The majority of the rural poor communities are currently challenged by the impact of climate change as it is threatening their sources of livelihoods. This research investigates how rural communities of women are making an effort to reduce poverty. These women live in Eastern Botswana and depend on natural resources and their products to sustain their livelihoods. The research investigates how women of Eastern Botswana exploit natural resources for subsistence and commercial purposes. It examines different ways in which they benefit from exploiting the resources, the skills they derive from processing these resources, and how they cope with the challenges of climate change to promote sustainability. The research generated data through documents analysis, observations, focus groups and interviews.

Keywords: Poverty, natural resources, climate change, livelihoods.

1. Introduction

Over 70% of Botswana's population lives in the rural areas. The majority of these people are women who are pre-dominantly subsistence farmers. They derive their livelihood from subsistence agriculture and other rural activities, but these livelihoods, like in most parts of the world, are threatened by climate change. The agricultural sector's reliance on seasonal and rain-fed cultivation makes the sector particularly vulnerable to climate variability and change. Botswana is prone to droughts, which have become more frequent over the last two decades with devastating impacts on food security, health, and environmental degradation. In many rural areas, such as the Tswapong Hills region in eastern Botswana, women are poor and depend on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods.

The climate of Botswana is described as arid or semi-arid with rainfall ranging between 250 mm and 650 mm per annum. The national average rainfall is 475 mm per year. The rainfall season is from October to April each year. However, rainfall is unreliable and variable. The variation is affecting the annual supply of natural resources and products that women depend on.

On a global scale, climate change is brought about by the increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere as a result of human activities such as burning of fossil fuels, electricity generation by coal burning, industrial processes, cutting down of trees and burning of the savanna (grassland). The greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere include: carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), sulphates (SO_x), water vapor, and so forth.

2. Women and natural resources utilization

Gender issues and natural resources utilization for sustainable development discourse are current topical issues that cannot be avoided. Statistically, women are the hardest hit by poverty wherever it exists. The Government of Botswana has come up with several policies and projects to empower women in particular to participate in economic activities that could reduce, if not, eliminate poverty among women, particularly women-headed households. Women, particularly poor women, are often blamed for degrading the environment in trying to make a living out of the available natural resources. In recognition of this issue, the Government of Botswana has initiated the formation of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) through the Community Based Natural Resources Management Policy (CBNRM) (Republic of Botswana, 2007) to encourage sustainable utilization of natural resources. The policy encourages local communities to participate in natural resources management. In response to this policy, a group of twenty-six villages in the Tswapong area in Eastern Botswana, have formed a community based Trust to sustainably utilize and manage natural resources within their area. The Trust, called *Kgetsi ya Tsie* (abbreviated, KyT), is a women's community based organization involved in the management of

natural resources. Its purpose is to assist rural women to empower themselves, both socially and economically by effectively organising their entrepreneurial activities, based on sustainable management of natural resources (KyT, 2009). This objective is challenged by the effects of climate change and variability that also affect the seasonal supply of the resources. This study intends to examine the role of women, their participation, and benefits through self-empowerment to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development in the face of climate change.

3. National policies

The Government of Botswana has established national policies to encourage communities to participate in poverty reduction. Some of the policies include a policy on natural resources management. This policy, called Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) has been mentioned in the preceding section (Republic of Botswana, 2007). "It gives communities incentives to engage in participation in conservation activities leading to sustainable development and poverty reduction" (page 2). The policy's objectives include the following:

- Specify land tenure and natural resources user rights, which may be developed to communities;
- Establish a framework that provides incentives for communities to manage natural resources in a sustainable manner;
- Create opportunities for community participation in natural resources management;
- Protect the intellectual property rights of communities with regard to natural resources and the management of such resources (Republic of Botswana, 2007, page 5). The concept of CBNRM embraces the integration of indigenous knowledge and management systems and optimum benefits from traditional knowledge systems. "Natural resources gain value through use, beneficiation and commercialization" (Republic of Botswana, 2007, page 10).

Linked to natural resources management policy is the National Tourism Policy (1996) (Republic of Botswana, 2002), the National Eco-tourism Strategy (2002) (Republic of Botswana, 2002) and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (2001). Both the tourism and eco-tourism policies provide opportunities for both citizens and non-citizens to engage in enterprises that create jobs for local communities including the unskilled laborers. The National Poverty Reduction Strategy (2001) guides and facilitates the coordination of various poverty related efforts by the various sectors. It encompasses cost-effective interventions and time-bound objectives and targets, which are gender and health sensitive, environmentally friendly, and sustainable. It is integrated into District Development Plans and National Development Plans (Republic of Botswana, 2003).

4. *Kgetsi ya Tsie* (KyT)

In response to national policies, a group of women in twenty-six villages in the Tswapong area in Eastern Botswana, have formed a community based Trust known as *Kgetsi ya Tsie* (KyT), to sustainably manage natural resources within their area. As mentioned earlier, its purpose is to assist rural women to empower themselves, both socially and economically by more effectively organising their entrepreneurial activities, based on sustainable management of natural resources (KyT, 2009). *Kgetsi ya Tsie* (KyT) was established in 1997 using the bottom up approach. KyT works with over 1200 women in the region to produce ten business products from natural resources found in their area. Starting with small, 5-person resource user groups in nine villages, to twenty-six villages, they moved on to federate their groups into thirty-two local Village Centres. Finally, these Centres formed an Association, registering as a grassroots Community Trust in 1999 (KyT, 2009).

In empowering themselves, the KyT members have increased their annual cash income by over 500%, from an average of P440 in 1996 to over P3 000 in 2003 per person (KyT, 2009). While they have inevitably increased production, this increase has come about mainly due to more effective storage, quality control and marketing strategies - decreasing wastage and getting better prices for their produce. Equally significant, members, many of whom were previously on the destitute rolls of the district, have gained a new found confidence. Coupled with experience in the representative structures of KyT, this has led many of them into playing active roles in their village communities. A significant number of KyT women have been appointed to serve on their respective Village Development Committees (V.D.Cs), Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) and other bodies. The KyT operates a micro-loan scheme, the default rate of which is very low, attributable largely to the strong social structure of the groups, who take collective responsibility for individual loans. They have set up a factory in the village of Lerala whose main activity is the production of *morula* oil and soap. These new skin care products have remarkable properties and are produced to very high quality standards.

4.1 How KyT works

At village level, members organize themselves into **groups** of five. Groups within a village organise themselves into **Centres**. Each Centre elects a representative to their **Regional Council**. In turn, Regional Councils appoint members to serve on the **Board of Trustees**. The Board decides on policy issues and appoints a Project Co-

ordinator and a team of staff to implement those decisions. Actual management of resources, production, micro-lending and marketing are carried out at individual and group levels. Decisions flow up and down the organisation but are always made at the lowest possible level.

4.2 KyT Products

KyT's products are all based on locally found natural resources. Harvesting of those resources is managed so as to ensure their sustainability. For example, 1 500 *morula* trees were planted by members in 2001. The range of products is continually growing and includes *morula* skin products, food products and traditional herbal remedies. Most products are highly seasonal and complement each other to provide all year round activity (KyT, 2009).

5. Conceptual Background

This research explored concepts such as human capabilities, human agency, and community of practice. **Capabilities** – sufficient basic human capabilities, for example, education and good health which enable members of an organization to escape from poverty. The research deployed Sen's capability approach. This is described by Walker (Walker, 2005, page 103) as "to what people are actually able to be and do, rather than to what resources they have access to. It focuses on developing people's capability to choose a life that they have reason to value". The research explored "opportunities to develop capabilities and the process of deciding collectively on valuable capabilities" (ibid: 104) in educational contexts. It focused on lived capabilities at the level of everyday life in the context of natural resources management and climate change. For Walker (2005) capability approach provides analytical tools to examine what individuals are able to do and having the reason to value what they do. That is, it emphasizes on reflective and informed choices by individuals as well as to evaluate people's agency and freedom in doing things they have reason to value. The research investigated KyT's capabilities and freedom to achieve poverty reduction through natural resources management projects and entrepreneurial activities. That is, do they "have the freedom to achieve these ..., to live one kind of life, rather than another, to have real opportunity to accomplish what we value" (Walker, 2005).

The concept of **human agency** was explored alongside human capability approach. As Walker puts it:

Notions of agency are central to the capability approach. At the boundary of functioning's and capabilities is the matter of choice, where a person exercises his or her agency, having the requisite set of capabilities, to make choices from a range of options and alternatives, if such a choice achieves his or her well-being. By agency, Sen means 'someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements are to be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well' (Bell, 1999:19). Agency is one's ability to pursue goals that one values. Agency and well-being are then deeply connected (Walker, 2005).

Walker continues to posit that "human agency is having the capacity to make informed and reflexive choices" (Ibid: 108). This on-going research explores ways in which quality education could play in developing and expanding capabilities, for example, in entrepreneurial skills and/or expanding the opportunities people in an organization have (for example members of KyT), for example, acquiring basic skills, thus making it possible to develop abilities and success in a range of sustainable business possibilities.

Community of practice: The project explored the concept of a **community of practice** (often abbreviated as CoP) among rural women. The concept refers to the process of social learning that occurs and shared socio-cultural practices that emerge and evolve when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals. Rural women that have formed a community based organization (for example, KyT) utilize natural resources products for both subsistence and commercial purposes. They had informally acquired skills to identify, harvest or collect and process the products. The KyT members are a community "of practitioners into which newcomers would enter and attempt to acquire the socio-cultural practices of the community. More recently, Community of Practice has become associated with knowledge management as people have begun to see it as a way of developing social capital, nurturing new knowledge, stimulating innovation, or sharing existing tacit knowledge within an organization" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, page 8).

Lave and Wenger (1991) described CoPs in terms of the interplay of four fundamental dualities: participation versus reification, designed versus emergent, identification versus negotiability and local versus global although, possibly because of the possible link to knowledge management, the participation versus reification duality has been the focus of most interest. For Etienne Wenger, learning is central to human identity. A primary focus of Wenger's work is on learning as social participation – the individual as an active participant in the practices of social communities, and in the construction of his/her identity through these communities. From this understanding develops the concept of the **community of practice**: a group of individuals participating in communal activity, and experiencing/continuously creating their shared identity through

engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities (ibid).

The benefits that Communities of Practice claimed as part of a knowledge management (KM) program have led them to become the focus of much attention. Earlier approaches to KM treated knowledge as object (explicit knowledge); however, Communities of Practice offer a way to theorize tacit knowledge which cannot easily be captured, codified and stored. The knowledge that is shared and learned in communities of practice is social capital. People connect at various levels without the constraints of a formal structure. As people connect with each other they are able to share their expertise and learn from each other. The benefits of this interaction include the following:

- Problem solving
- Developing new capabilities
- Leveraging best practices
- Standardizing practices
- Time savings
- Increase in talent
- Avoiding mistakes (Lave and Wenger, 1991)

People are the best conduits of information. They confer with members of a CoP on tacit knowledge which is not found in books. For example, one person can share the best way to handle a situation based on her/his experiences, which may enable the other person to avoid mistakes and shorten the learning curve. In a CoP, members can openly discuss and brainstorm about a project which can lead to new capabilities. The type of information that is shared and learned in a CoP is boundless (Lave and Wenger, 1991) (ibid).

6. Statement of the Problem

This research was conducted to explore gender based poverty reduction through sustainable natural resources management. Climate change is factored in as it affects the livelihoods of the women constraining their efforts to reduce poverty among them.

7. Objectives

The following objectives guided the research to respond to the statement of the problem stated in the preceding section:

1. To investigate how women in the sample use products of natural resources to reduce poverty among them.
2. To investigate how climate change affects the supply of natural products that these women depend upon to reduce poverty among them.
3. To investigate the strategies that these women use to adapt to the effects of climate change on the supply of natural resources from which they obtain products that they sell to alleviate themselves from poverty.

8. Research Method

Research design: The study followed a qualitative approach. It was carried out among a sample of 55 respondents drawn from eight (8) villages and ten (10) centers. *Methods of enquiry* included a questionnaire, research schedule, focus group discussion, interviews, observation, and documents analysis. A questionnaire was used to generate data among KyT members on their capabilities, views on knowledge, quality education, and different ways of knowledge and sustainability of natural resources that are sources of their livelihoods. The questionnaire was distributed to those who are literate and those who are not literate were assisted by the research assistants to answer the questions. A research schedule was used to generate data among KyT Centre Chairpersons. The schedule allowed probing to gain a deeper understanding of the issues raised. It also assisted in triangulating issues that were raised by individual and focus group members. In addition, Focus group discussions were used to generate data in this research project. Focus group discussions were organized and arranged at KyT centers and villages for members.

Interviews were conducted among individual members at their homes, in the center and at their factory. In addition, observations were done at the KyT factory, during meetings, and in the field where raw materials are collected to collect primary data. Observation is a method of purposefully, systematically and selectively collecting data by way of watching and listening to respondents through interaction or interacting with a phenomenon/phenomena as it takes place (Kumar, 1999). The final technique of data generation was documents analysis. This was done to gain a thorough understanding of KyT historical background and how it is progressing in the context of the role of rural women in the utilization of natural resources to reduce poverty amongst them. This was also to reflect on the national policies on natural resources, benefits of communities of practice and climate change and variability.

Consideration of ethical issues was of paramount importance particularly when dealing with poor women, some of whom are extremely poor and vulnerable to climate change and variability. This enabled striking a balance between the role of the researcher and the rights and values of the research participants. Gaining access to KyT and its center was negotiated with relevant authorities. All ethical questions were addressed and observed before and during data generation or collection “by seeking subject’s agreement to be interviewed and quoted, negotiating release of transcripts, etc.” (Gough, 2003:3). Participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and their rights as participants in research before data collection. This was done to ensure that there is an informed consent, free choice to take part and to place some form of responsibility on the participants with regard to the answers they would be giving (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000; Bell, 1999).

9. Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

9.1 Benefits from products of natural resources (or nature) and products from arable farming

Women in the sample identified natural products such as *galalatshwene*, *phane*, *motopi*, *mosata* or *mosade*, *monepenepene*, *lerotse*, *letsopa*, *bojang*, *mmupudu*, and *morula* as sources of products that they process and sell locally and internationally.

9.2 Brief descriptions of natural and farm products used by members of KyT

Galalatshwene (resurrection plant/*Myrothamnus flabellifolius*) and *monepenepene* are plants which are traditionally used as herbs by traditional doctors or herbalists. *Galalatshwene* is used to treat diseases such as high blood pressure and stroke. *Monepenepene* (Long pod cassia tree/*Cassia abbreviata*) is used for blood pressure and purification and treatment of diseases in general.

Phane or *mophane* worms (these are caterpillars of a moth called Anamalous Moth/*Imbrasia belina*) are edible nutritious worms in Botswana. These worms flourish well in the *mophane tree* (*Colospermum mopane*) habitat. It is eaten on its own or used as relish for starchy food items such as maize and sorghum porridge. *Phane* is delicious when dried and cooked or cooked with salt added to it.

Motopi or *motlopi* (Shepherd’s tree/*Boscia albitrunca*) is a tree that produces red fruits that are edible (Mmolai, 2009). *Motopi* fruits are red when ripe.

Mosata or *mosade* (*Orphanthera jasminiflora*) is a shrub that produces edible fruits. It is processed to produce artificial meat, technically called *biltong* or dried meat, which is sold locally or exported.

Lerotse refers to a melon grown in Botswana as a foodstuff. The melon is traditionally used as an ingredient of a type of porridge that has a sweet or sugary taste. *Lerotse* porridge is normally eaten with sour milk, or *madila* in Setswana language. (Setswana is a national language in Botswana (all citizens of Botswana are required to speak it for the sake of achieving unity) while English is the official language).

Letsopa refers to the type of clay traditionally used to make pottery. *Letsopa* belongs to types of clay scientifically and collectively known as *phyllosilicates*.

Bojang (there are various species, for example, *Egrostis pallens*/Motshikiri, *Stipagrostis uniplumis*/Tshikitshane and *Aristida congesta* (Seloka) which are grasses used for thatching huts and other dwelling structures, and for grazing domesticated animals. *Egrostis pallens* is used for thatching rondavels and it is of higher quality than the other two species, that is, *Stipagrostis uniplumis* and *Aristida congesta*. The latter (*Stipagrostis uniplumis* and *Aristida congesta*), being of poor quality, are used for thatching temporary and low quality dwelling structures at the lands known as *ditlaagana* (in Setswana) and in some villages where high quality grass is not available or people cannot afford high quality types of grass it is used for thatching rondavel dwellings. Some wild animals also feed on grass, for example, the kudu, the buffalo and other herbivores.

Mmupudu are fruits produced from *mmupudu* tree (*Mimusops zeyheri*). The *mmupudu* tree grows wildly in the Tswapong region in Botswana. *Mmupudu* fruits are yellowish in color when ripe and they are eaten (by humans) as they are harvested directly from the tree. *Mmupudu* fruits are also a source of food for some wild animals, more especially baboons. *Mmupudu* does not have any medicinal use.

Muchijane refers to a plant that is used for medicinal purposes. It is used to treat high blood pressure, for blood purification and to improve blood circulation.

Morula (*Sclerocarya bierra*) (Mmolai, 2009) refers to a naturally growing tree that produces green fruits which become yellow when ripe. *Morula* fruits are eaten when ripe. The hard cores (or kernels) that remain after the *morula* fruits have been eaten are dried and then cracked to produce nuts that are edible either on their own or added to some dried and ground meat to produce a tasty food that is popular in the Tswapong region. The nuts are also added to dried or green vegetables, another tasty form of relish. The kernels are also processed into cooking oil, chicken feed, to make lip balm, face oil, facial wash, body wash, soap, and the juice is drunk fresh or allowed to ferment to produce an alcoholic drink.

The benefits that these communities of women derive from being members of *Kgetsi-Ya Tsie* Trust fall under five categories: (a) Selling natural products (and processed products) and products from arable farming, (b) Skills training, (c) Loans and grants, and (d) Life insurance.

9.3 Selling natural products (and processed products) and products from arable farming.

Members of KyT sell natural products to the trust to make money to eradicate poverty among them. These natural products (or resources) include: *phane*, *galalatshwene*, *motopi* fruits, *mosata* (or *mosade*), *monepenepe*, *bojang* (grass), *mochijane* and *mmupudu*. In addition, these women process natural products to make products that they sell locally directly to consumers. The Trust also buys natural products from members and processes them into finished products which it sells locally and internationally. Among the processed products that members sell to the Trust are: jam, made from *lerotse* or *morula*, oil from *morula* (for making hair oil, and so on), and so on. The Trust buys natural products from members which it processes into finished products. These include: *galalatshwene*, *mosata* (or *mosade*), *monepenepe*, *mochijane* and *mmupudu*. *Galalatshwene* is a herb that is used to make medicine that reduces tiredness, high blood pressure, headache, stress, and stroke. *Mosata* (*mosade*) is a herb that is used dried and made into artificial biltong. Culturally (or traditionally), *mosata* is used as an ingredient in different dishes of relish. The herb also has medicinal value for general health. *Monepenepe* is a herb that is used as medicine for high blood pressure. As a result of similarities in use(s), *monepenepe* may be combined with *Galalatshwene*.

9.4 Skills training

Members of KyT acquire various skills, which include making jam from *morula* fruits and *lerotse*. Members are also trained on how to manage the small businesses that they own, most of which are set up with the money they earn from selling natural products and resources to KyT and the money they are given as loans by KyT.

9.5 Loans and grants

Members of KyT are given loans of P1500 to P15 000 which they use to set up small businesses such as tuck shops and tailoring. The interest charged is 5%, which some members think is exorbitant and they would like it reduced. In addition, they are also given small amounts of money as grants, for example, P150 or more. In most cases, grants precede loans. Usually, KyT members receive grants first and then apply for loans whenever they feel that grants are insufficient to meet their needs and/or requirements.

9.6 Life insurance

Members of KyT benefit from a life insurance policy provided by the trust. The maximum value insured for each member is P3 000. Some members feel that this figure is small and would like it increased to P6 000.

9.6 Effects of climate change on the supply of natural and farm products

Low rainfall, which is often unreliable, leads to occasional droughts all of which reduce production and supply of veld products. The effects of drought are often exacerbated by poor harvesting methods used primarily by young women, for example, uprooting of *Galalatshwene* herb. Some adults also overharvest some herbs, especially traditional doctors and herbalists. They do this to promote commercial activities in their areas of practice. They need a continuous supply of medicines and hence exacerbate the effects of climate change with respect to natural resources supply. What is important to them is adequate supply of medicinal herbs not environmental sustainability. *Galalatshwene* is by far the most affected herb. This may be attributed to the fact that it treats various ailments. *Lerotse* (*mellon*) is another crop that is also affected by drought. Its supply is greatly reduced by drought.

9.7 Adaptations to effects of climate change

During drought period when there is limited supply of natural products members of KyT trust adapt several coping strategies, which include the following:

- (a) They use natural products that require very little rainfall, for example, *Galalatshwene*, *Monepenepe* and *Mosata*. Another tree that often withstands drought is the *morula* tree even though during such times it produces poor fruits which are often very dry. Such fruits produce poor products when processed.
- (b) They grow and sell vegetables using a government scheme for poverty alleviation which encourages development of backyard gardens.
- (c) They look for jobs such as sweeping and weeding their neighbors' yards and washing clothes.
- (d) They engage in recycling projects such as making plastic mats.
- (e) Some resort to sloughing their fields although they get low yields due to poor rains.
- (f) They buy food from shops (stores)
- (g) They brew and sell traditional beer.
- (h) They operate truck shops, selling a variety of products including fat cakes.

10. Conclusion

This paper has examined the benefits that members of *Kgetsi-Ya-Tsie* Trust derive from their membership and

activities of the trust which helps alleviate poverty among them. Since they use products from nature, they are linked to nature for which climate is a component. As a result of this connectivity, they are affected by climate change. In essence, a change in climate adversely affects the supply of natural products from which they derive their livelihoods. In order to alleviate the effects of climate change, these members, who are all women, have developed some mechanisms or strategies through which they cope with the effects of climate change. These strategies or mechanisms are a network of a diversity of strategies and it is this diversity that makes them effective and hence sustains these people through the hard times.

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