Citizen Engagement in Public Policy Making Process in Africa: The Case of Botswana

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Abstract

This article is a documentary and historical analysis of the experience of Botswana in citizen engagement in the public policy making process before and during the administration of President Festus Mogae that ended in April 2008. Public policy making in many African countries has long been dominated by a 'top-down approach' which is a hangover from either the long period of military dictatorship in many of the countries or from the authoritarian one-party system in some of them. Many existing participatory mechanisms only provide symbolic forms of participation. However, Botswana to a large extent is an exception as decentralized planning is a priority in the governance process with its citizen engagement process rooted in the consultative framework of traditional 'kgotla' democratic system of governance. Although active participative form of citizen engagement is yet to be fully achieved, Botswana's existing citizen engagement mechanisms are no doubt a model for other African countries to emulate.

Keywords: Public policy, Citizen engagement, Decentralization, Citizen participation, Traditional Kgotla system, civic participation.

1. Introduction

The democratic content of governance in Africa is still a matter of serious concern both within and outside Africa. As Leber (2003) describes it, the political panorama in modern Africa is sadly one of destitution and hopelessness, for democracy and political stability seem elusive as rain in a season of drought. Leber's description can hardly be faulted as many countries in Africa have had long histories of either military rule characterized by coups and counter-coups, or authoritarian one-party system. Some few others are still under a monarchical system of government coexisting side by side with weak institutions of representative democracy.

However, the nineties and beyond have witnessed some changes in the willingness of many African countries to adopt democracy as a preferred system of government even though this trend has been seriously hampered by internal conflicts and wars in many of these countries. As African leaders observed through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the number of democratically elected leaders is on the increase and this spread is backed by the African Union (AU) which has shown a new resolve to censure deviation from the norm (NEPAD, 2001). Also African countries have declared to take joint responsibility for 'promoting and protecting democracy by developing clear standards of accountability, transparency and participatory governance at the national and sub-national levels' (NEPAD, 2001).

But one exceptional country in Africa that remained faithful to its choice at independence in 1966 of a representative democracy is the Republic of Botswana located in the heart of the Southern African region. It is arguable if such success could have been recorded if the citizens were not carried along in the public policy making process, or alienated through a top-down approach to development planning. We say so because as Karlsson, et al (1993) rightly observed 'in Botswana, decentralization is a national political priority, and is well formulated in the Constitution as well as in other policy documents, such as the present National Development Plan. Clearly, decentralization has higher priority than in other African countries'. The success of Botswana in this is usually attributed to its inherited traditional Kgotla system (ie the age-long popular participatory Village Public Gathering or Forum utilized for both political and administrative purposes). Yet in our view, the kgotla system can be described as the critical part of the necessary conditions, while a focused national political

leadership and its 'commitment to the principle of bottom-up planning' (Lekorwe, 1998) on the other hand, can be described as the most important part of the sufficient conditions.

Be that as it may, this paper examines how the government of Botswana engaged its citizens in the policy-making process prior to, and during the President Festus Mogae administration. The paper examines and analyzes available informational, consultative and participatory mechanisms involved in the citizen engagement process. The paper is divided into six sections inclusive of this section. Consequently, section two presents the theoretical framework of discussion and section three examines the citizen engagement culture of Botswana. Thereafter, sections four and five empirically assess the level of citizen engagement in Botswana with two different assessment frameworks. Finally, section six presents the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework of Discussion

2.1 Decentralization and Citizen Participation

Decentralization for active citizen participation has become one of the greatest challenges facing governments in this twenty-first century. As Ormond (1997) rightly observed, decentralization is one of the new challenges for public administration in this twenty-first century. Citizens are seeking new ways to express their 'voice', and, through better information, access to the media and lobbying techniques, they have the tools to do this. How best to consult on public decisions and policies, programs and services is one of the major issues which contemporary governments have to solve, concludes Ormond.

Yet a little insight into history reveals that this challenge is not a new one but rather has been a re-occurring phenomenon at different points in time. For example, the period of the sixties saw 'a significant increase in demands and proposals for greater governmental decentralization and more citizen involvement in the making and execution of public policy' (Herbert, 1972; see also Valk & Wekwete, 1990). But as Herbert however observed, decentralization neither assumes nor implies participation. For instance, evidence from studies of three African countries (Tanzania, Kenya & Sudan) reveal that in spite of decentralized structures, the major goal of popular participation remained largely unachieved at the lower levels (Rondinelli, 1981), and in many other African countries, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the clawing back of power by the center with attempts to exert even greater central control over local decisions (Turner and Hulme, 1997; Hyden, 1983).

Yet again, it is incontrovertible that 'participatory democracy is impossible without the extensive decentralization of public organizations' (Hart, 1972). Empirical evidence across the globe demonstrates this fact from time to time. For example, a study of the Cebu City in the Philippines by Rakodi (2004), shows that local levels of representation provide channels for consultation, participation and accountability in addition to making the bureaucracy more effective and accessible to residents. And as Hart (1972) also put it, the primary justification of decentralization by its advocates is that it creates an optimal condition for citizen participation'. Furthermore, as Rondinelli (1981) rightly observed, decentralization is advocated as a way of eliciting widespread participation in the decision-making considered essential to the development process. And it is particularly needed to institutionalize participation of citizens in development planning and management. The assumption according to Hart (1972) 'is that participation produces better citizens, because through participation they realize their full potentials'. And as Hallman (1971, quoted in Hart 1972) summed it, one of the reasons for decentralization is 'to achieve better relationships with citizens'. Consequently citizen engagement in the public policy process has come to be seen rightly as an essential ingredient and attribute of a viable participatory democracy. And as Michels (2011) puts it, citizen participation is usually considered a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making.

2.2 Citizen Engagement as a Concept

Scholars are in agreement that citizen engagement refers to ways, activities or processes for involving citizens in the public policy process. However what constitutes these ways are not necessarily the same wherever citizen engagement takes place. In reality, they appear as a continuum consisting a long list of mechanisms, tools or models some of which reflect peculiarities in political, economic and socio-cultural backgrounds of nations.

Citizen Engagement can be conceived as the 'interactive and iterative processes of deliberation among citizens (and sometimes organizations) and between citizens and government officials with the purpose of contributing meaningfully to specific public policy decisions in a transparent and accountable way' (Phillips and Orsini, 2002). Again it is defined as the many ways in which a government uses to connect with citizens in the development and implementation of policies, programs and services. (Queensland Government, 2004). For Pinto (2000) the term's scope extends beyond the traditional notions of consultation, to encompass any activity that draws the public into a closer relationship with government. Hence as Bourgon (1998) put it, 'in essence, citizen

engagement is a two-way learning process between citizens and their democratically elected and public institutions in search for common ground'.

2.3. Benefits of Citizen Engagement

According to OECD (2001), 'strengthening relations with citizens is a sound investment in better policy-making and a core element of good governance'. Secondly, it allows government to tap new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources when making decisions. Thirdly and equally important, it contributes to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity. Finally, such efforts help strengthen representative democracy, in which parliaments play a central role. Again, a study by Michels (2011) reveals that citizen involvement has a number of positive effects on democracy: it increases issue knowledge, civic skills, and public engagement, and contributes to the support for decisions among the participants.

Although we can universalize the benefits of citizen engagement in public policy making, it is important to note that some benefits that may occur in countries at higher levels of political, economic and technological development may not necessarily apply to other countries at lower levels of development. For example, governments in OECD countries that are strengthening relations with their citizens' do so with the hope of achieving some objectives whose infrastructural base may not be widely present in many developing countries. Also even though citizen engagement is 'fundamental in a representative democracy' (World Learning Armenia, 2004), its forms and levels differ across countries.

In an empirical study of 6,0000 people in 14 American cities that examined the impact of citizen participation upon citizens, institutions and the life of those cities, it was found out that there's a fairly strong relationship between the amount of, and quality of, citizen participation in these cities and the quality of life and quality of decision-making (Markus, 1999).

2.4. Tools and Models of Citizens Engagement

A wide range of tools and models of citizen engagement have been identified (OECD, 2001, 2002; Mackinnon, 2004). The OECD (2001, 2002) has provided what Curtain (2003) called a three-stage model of citizen engagement, which is also a model of government –citizen relations. The first is the Information provision stage, which is a one-way relation in which government produces and delivers information for use by citizens. The second is the Consultation stage, which is a two-way relation in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government. The third and higher level stage is Active Participation**,** which is a partnership relation in which citizens actively propose policy options and shape the policy dialogue, but where government retains the responsibility for policy formulation and final decisions.

Emerging from these stages are four broad categories or forms of citizen participation (Curtain, 2003). Under the first category are the more traditional forms of consultation such as public meeting, consultation documents, co-option to committees and question and answer session. The second category includes client-oriented feedback in the form of service satisfaction surveys; and complaints/suggestions schemes used in relation to service delivery. The third category comprises innovative participative methods such as interactive websites, citizens' panels, focus groups and referenda. And lastly, approaches that encourage citizens to deliberate over issues through mechanisms such as citizens' juries, community plans/needs analysis, visioning exercises and issue forums.

Various countries are at different stages in the utilization of these various frameworks of engagement and relations. For example, an OECD report (2001) reveals that in many OECD countries that have 'long-standing traditions of extensive citizen involvement', and who are now 'looking for new, and complementary ways to include citizens in policy-making', information provision to their citizens is now an objective shared by all. Also the scope, quantity and quality of such information have increased over the last decade (OECD, 2001). Secondly the report says that consultation is on the rise but at a slower rate and large differences remain among OECD countries, and thirdly active participation is still rare, undertaken on a pilot basis only and confined to a very few countries.

In some specific countries, citizen engagement activities are quite high and widespread. In Britain for instance, a survey of different forms of public participation in 216 local governments reveals that 92% of the local governments used service satisfaction surveys while 86% used complaints/suggestion schemes. In many local governments other forms of public participation are widely used.

In Canada, citizen engagement activities have become so widespread (in some cases mandatory) and

increasingly sophisticated. According to Bourgon (1998), citizen engagement is 'an important priority of the government' which had acknowledged that 'building the Canada of tomorrow will involve collaboration, partnership, and the active engagement of Canadians in all walks of life'. As O'Malley (2004) rightly observed, 'consultative processes are part of the public policy and government decision-making process'. For example, 'in most type of regulatory activity, consultation with affected publics and stakeholders are now mandatory'. Furthermore, the government has moved from engaging only stakeholders to engaging citizens directly as individuals in the consideration and resolution of issues. More recently, Woodford and Preston (2013) report that in Canada strengthening citizen participation in national policy issues, has been a priority. As they rightly observed, citizen participation has a longstanding history in Canadian policy-making.

At the constituent level of the Canadian government, the Queensland Government uses tools such as Internet broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings, community cabinets, and online engagement through e-petitions, online consultation and a community engagement website (Queensland Government, 2004).

Having reviewed the general literature, it is now appropriate to shift our attention to the experience of Botswana in citizen engagement. In doing this, we shall adopt as a theoretical framework of analysis, Curtain's (2003) four broad categories or forms of citizen engagement, and OECD's (2001; 2002) three-stage model of government-citizen relations in our assessment.

3. The Citizen Engagement Culture of Botswana

3.1 The Context

Botswana is a landlocked country that shares borders with South Africa to the south and east, Namibia to the west and north, Zambia and Zimbabwe to the north-east. It covers a total land surface area of 582,000 sq. km with about two-thirds covered with thick sand layers of the Kalahari Desert (B & T Botswana Directory, 2003/2004; UNDP, 2002). The population has increased from 1,326,796 in 1991 (Campbell, 1998), to 1.678,891 (1.68million) in the 2001 Population & Housing Census (Central Statistics Office, 2003), and to its present figure of 2,024,904 (2 million) people based on the 2011 Population and Housing Census (Republic of Botswana, Central Statistics Office, 2011).

Botswana has a republican system of government with a President heading the executive branch. The Legislature, which is vested with supreme authority, is made up of the President and the National Assembly. The Legislature operates in consultation with the House of Chiefs charged with the function of advising it on matters relating to customs and tradition. There is also in existence an independent judiciary that forms the third arm of the government (B & T Botswana Directory, 2003/2004). The Constitution guarantees the existence of a multi-party system, which has remained in operation even though only one party (the Botswana Democratic Party) has dominated the political landscape since independence.

It is generally believed that participatory democracy did not come to Botswana with the advent of independence but rather had always been part of the culture of the people (Merafhe, 2003). Two systems of democracy exist in a juxtaposed position in Botswana namely the direct democracy model of kgotla and the modern representative democracy (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999). The kgotla democratic culture and practice therefore constitute a major defining feature of Botswana.

3.2 The Traditional Kgotla System of Popular Participation

The traditional Botswana society comprises the family (the nuclear set-up), the family group (extended and closely related families or households), and the ward (one or more family groups). One or more family groups that organized together for administrative purposes is called a ward or kgotla which strictly interpreted means the place of assembly (Tlou, 1998). As Tlou also aptly stated, the ward was a distinct social and political unit headed by a hereditary headman or head of the village and it had a well defined administrative and judicial powers and functions. Furthermore, the ward was the highest level of social organization and as such constituted the smallest territorial unit in the administration of the polity in that the king or chief (traditionally called kgosi) delegated some governmental powers to the heads of wards (called kgosana) (Tlou, 1998).

The king (kgosi) who was the nerve center of traditional Botswana society in the pre-colonial period, was assisted by his councilors who he consulted and received advice from in the administration of his area. Although the kings could be autocratic, they nevertheless employed a certain degree of democracy by consulting their councilors and elders before implementing major decisions affecting their people (Mgadla, 1998). The kings were expected to govern with the interests of their people at heart following the saying that a chief was a chief by the people (Mgadla, 1998) and was even expected to provide his people with sustenance (Schapera, 1955;

Mgadla, 1998). It was an essential part of the kgotla system for all the people to participate in the deliberations, and 'the king took account of the opinions expressed at the meeting' and 'rarely did the kings go against the opposition of the people' (Tlou, 1998). However 'women did not sit at the traditional assembly except when specifically asked to testify or to give evidence in a case' (Mgadla, 1998).

What happened at independence writes Merafhe (2003) 'was simply the advancement of the traditional kgotla system to a higher level of parliamentary democracy'. Again, he attributes the stability and social harmony that Botswana enjoys to the kgotla culture of peace and tolerance, for as he contends also, the people of Botswana 'from time immemorial have revered the saying that it is better to jaw-jaw than to war war'.

It was also along this perspective that Hawthorne (2000) who described Botswana as 'the model of a modern black democracy' observed that it has 'a system of government as old as the Desert Sands'. Going further with admiration, he aptly said, 'diamonds may be the heart of Botswana but its soul is still the kgotla'. Describing the pervasive character of the kgotla culture and its appeal in the entire society, he approvingly wrote:

> Essentially it means aggression is better expressed with argument than the spear.
> It also embraces the right to be heard. A humble shepherd boy can talk to a
> headman. At Debswana's mines, the lowliest worker can confront the boss.
> 'If in doubt', says Terry Stewart, general manager of Debswana's Orapa mine,
> 'we call a kgotla and everybody gets their say (Hawthorne, 2000).

Also, van Binsbergen (1994) captured this pervasive spirit of the kgotla culture when he observed that:

> so much is the kgotla model the standard for ideal social behaviour, that it is
> immediately emulated whenever the diffusion of information, the need to
> arrive at a decision, or the settlement of a conflict necessitates the appeal
> to a common framework of interest and a shared model of action: in family
> matters, on the work-floor, in formal organizations, etc… effective
> ceremonies of consultation …are the hallmark of Botswana political culture.

3.3 The Kgotla Spirit in the Citizen Engagement Process of Botswana

The kgotla system can be regarded as the modern day democratic imperative of citizen engagement in the public policy making process in Botswana. In modern day Botswana, the kgotla has come to signify the embodiment of good governance measured by popular participation, consultation, accountability, transparency, and rule of law. Two principal features of the kgotla system are part of modern day public policy process. The first is the creation of 'freedom squares' which are 'open spaces set aside for public meetings of a political nature' and they 'exist in every residential area and village and are open to whatever political party applies for a permit to use them' (van Binsbergen, 1994). The second is the use of these open spaces to disseminate information to the people as well as to consult them.

Consequently, decentralization is a national priority in Botswana (Karlsson, et al (1993) and bottom-up planning is accepted by both the government at central and local levels as well as by the people (UNDP, 2002). There are therefore institutionalized structures in place to facilitate its process at both the district and village levels (see Gasper, 1990; Sharma, 1992, 1999a, 1999b; Karlsson, et al, 1993; Reilly & Tordoff, 1993; Lekorwe, 1998; UNDP, 2002). Administratively, Botswana is divided into districts (sub-districts) and villages. These decentralized structures, are coordinated at the level of central government by the Ministry of Local Government. Within this decentralized framework, four major structures are:

- District Administration: Headed by a District Commissioner appointed by the President, its function is to coordinate both local and central government activities in the area and therefore serves as deconcentration machinery than of devolution.
- District Council (Town and City Councils): Composed of democratically elected officials and headed by a Council Secretary, it exists as an instrument of devolution to perform certain statutory functions in the areas of primary education, primary health care, construction and maintenance of rural roads, village water supply, sanitation services, social and community development, self-help housing among others.
- Land Boards: Composed of mixed membership of 12 people (5 elected through the kgotla and 5 appointed by Minister in charge of Land matters, with 2 ex-officio members representing Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry), its function is to control the allocation and use of land hitherto exercised by the Chiefs.

(d) Tribal Administration: Headed by the Chiefs, its functions are to administer justice through the traditional or

customary courts, maintain customs and traditions of their people, settle local disputes, perform ceremonial activities, and serve as spokesmen for their people on customary matters.

And below the district level of administration, are the Village level structures made up of the Kgotla and the Village Development Committees (VDC). The kgotla serves as the village public forum which exercises important functions such as the election of members of the Land Boards. The Village Development Committee is 'the primary institution to promote and coordinate development at the village level. The committee is, a development sub-committee of the kgotla' (Karlsson, et al, 1993). The VDCs are forums for (a) initiating, planning, and implementing small village development projects; (b) grassroots level consultation concerning development; and (c) raising of funds for the general development and benefit of the people (Karlsson, et al, 1993).

4. Assessing the Presence of Curtains (2003) Four Broad Forms of Citizen Engagement

4.1. The Traditional Forms of Citizen Engagement:

- Public Meetings: These are held either at the kgotla or at other places to explain public policies and their stage of implementation. More importantly, they are used for consultative purposes. For example, ministries hold kgotla meetings as a part of the policy process for consultation purposes and to present progress report on their service delivery and performance. An example is the Ministry of Local Government's Progress Report, (Daily news, 2004).

- Question and Answer Sessions: This may be held at kgotla or other places at which Ministers, members of parliament and top public servants interact with the public or other lower level public servants. One example is the nationwide tours by the Minister and Assistant Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration during which they addressed public servants, held consultations with them and answered questions as well as gathered information towards solving their problems. This tour formed the subject of an Editorial Comment by Mmegi of Friday, March 28, 2004 in which it commended and supported the initiative. However, some of the workers saw the consultation tour as mere design to connect with the citizens because the 2004 general election was around the corner. For example, one complained that the Minister that visited them did not answer most of their questions. And another official asked 'what guarantee can he give us that he will implement our requests because he might not be given the same ministry if he is elected' (Mmegi, 2004).

- Co-option into Committees, and Availability of Consultative Documents: These tools are part of the public policy making process.

4.2. Client-Oriented Feedback Machinery: The holding of stakeholder consultative forums have also become regular part of the policy process especially among the public enterprises preparing for full commercialization or privatization. For example the Public Enterprises Evaluation and Privatization Agency (PEEPA) carried out public consultation activities to sell the privatization idea to various stakeholders including labour unions (Mmegi, 2004).

4.3. Innovative Participative Methods: There is no demonstrative evidence available to us (during the period under review) to show that innovative participative methods such as interactive websites are presently being utilized. What is evident is that the use of Internet facilities is growing rapidly due to government's heavy investment on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in public sector offices, tertiary and secondary school levels. It is only a matter of time for interactive websites to form part of the process since Botswana's Vision 2016 recognizes 'the importance of information and of developing efficient information system and networks' and accepting that the challenge is to 'ensure access of all families to information technology, television, audio and print media, and to further develop an environment conducive to the free flow of information among all of the communities of Botswana' (Vision 2016, 1997).

4.4. Mechanisms for Long term Deliberation of Strategic Issues: Although we are not aware of the use of citizens' juries in this category, Botswana has however carried out a Visioning Exercise that produced Vision 2016. Secondly and more importantly, the government uses the kgotla to carry out community needs analysis and development plans. In some cases, the government uses it to ask the communities to select which project(s) is of utmost priority to them in the face of budget constraint in a particular financial year. Citizen political awareness and consciousness deriving from access to information is no doubt on the increase as can be illustrated with the call by Taxi and Combi bus operators in Francistown to be included in decision making. They had criticized the Francistown City Council (FCC) and the central government Department of Transport for not involving them in decision-making on issues affecting their businesses (Mmegi, 2004).

5. Assessing the Level of OECD's Three Stage Model of Government-Citizen Relations

5.1. Nature and Effectiveness of Information Provision: During the period under review, information provision remained a priority of the government and this is regarded as part of the principles of accountability (Vision 2016, 1997). A government newspaper (Daily news) was distributed free of charge to the citizens as part of their rights to be informed. This newspaper publishes part of its sections in the local Setswana language (which along with English constitute the official language) to cater for the interest of those who otherwise would have been disadvantaged. Each day, (with the exception of Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays), the Government's Department of Information Services, was distributing 65,000 (sixty-five thousand) copies of this newspaper at strategic accessible locations to the citizens. As a matter of policy, the government advertises all vacancies in the newspapers and keeps the citizens informed on crucial issues. Government Annual reports and those of ad hoc Presidential Commissions on specific matters are usually published and sold at the government Press Bookshop at reasonable prices. Furthermore, there is regular publication of official statistics by the Central Statistics Office and these are available at the bookshop at reasonable prices.

Although the Freedom of Information Act was yet to be enacted during the period under review, Vision 2016 strongly states that the freedom of the press must be guaranteed in law and practice and that the freedom of information act must be introduced to protect the rights of citizens to have access to information, and to ensure the accountability of all public and private institutions (Vision 2016, 1997).

5.2. Character and Effectiveness of Consultative Machineries: The existence of decentralized institutions up to the village level made popular participation possible. There was evidence that such participation appeared real than symbolic, as can be demonstrated by the development planning process, which involves the major actors in the entire system. We would demonstrate this further by presenting a summary of the preparation stages of the National Development Plan (NDP) as documented by the UNDP (2002). This process begins with the preparation of the Keynote Policy Paper by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP). This is followed by Sectoral Keynote Policy Papers (SKIPs) prepared by Line Ministries, Local Authorities and other interested parties. At this stage, the Local Authorities engage their constituencies and Ministries in consultations on projects to be considered for the next plan. The next stage is the meeting of local and central planners to discuss how national projects are distributed to local authorities. A step further is the convening of the National District Development Conference (NDDC) made up of representatives of government and private sector officials and NGOs, for serious debate on the outcome of the process so far. The outcome of this are consolidated into a Major Issue Paper by MFDP for presentation and discussion by the Economic Committee of Cabinet for final resolution on planning issues. Subsequently, a detailed macro-economic forecast by MFDP, a Draft Macro-economic outline is prepared and circulated widely for comments. At this stage, the meeting of the Economic Committee of Cabinet is convened again to make a final resolution about resource allocation to different sectors and resolve outstanding issues before Ministries and Local Authorities actually begin to prepare their sectoral chapters. Thereafter a draft NDP is considered by it before being considered by the Cabinet and finally by Parliament for consideration in its Budget Sitting. This consultative process is replicated at the district, sub-district and village levels where the relevant local institutions as well as NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) make their contributions.

However a mixed bag of findings exists on the effectiveness of these participatory mechanisms. For example, Phaleng and Peer Consultancy Report (1997) observed that 'the institutional structure… for development planning at local level is quite good' (UNDP, 2002). Also, the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) (2001) in a material posted in its website observes that the reliance on village level institutions particularly the kgotla has 'allowed a measure of communication and consultation between the government and the rural people who are the majority of the population'. On the other hand, some studies have found that bureaucrats dominated the system in some crucial matters (Karlsson, et al, 1993; Lekorwe, 1998; UNDP, 2002), and that at times what passes for as consultation process turned out as a presentation of a shopping list of what people wanted (Lekorwe (1998). But Lekorwe then noted that 'there is an awareness that this problem exists and every effort was made to ensure that councilors play a significant role'. Secondly, Karlsson, et al, (1993) have found that most of the village level institutions have weak base, due to limited capacity, poor leadership and inactive members and as a result, the bottom-up approach frequently does not work effectively. Thirdly, according to the UNDP (2002), translating the 'bottom-up planning' into desired outcome remained a serious challenge. This it contends is because the planning process is not fully decentralized as central officials play crucial role of determining the allocation of resources. However, it notes that the contribution of district level organizations increased steadily.

With particular reference to the effectiveness of the kgotla system, the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa

(EISA) (2001) observes that Botswana's political system has been sustained through reliance on traditional institutions at the village level particularly the kgotla. On the hand, van Binsbergen (1994) argues from his case study of Francistown, that at times there is skilful manipulation of this model and that sometimes the actual proceedings of its meetings deviate from its spirit.

5.3. Nature of Active Participation: This remains a strong drive in government policy reflected in Vision 2016 which states that the 'stakeholder partnership' concept between Government and the private sector, between foreign investors and citizens, between large, medium and small scale investors must be explored and implemented immediately (Vision 2016, 1997).

6. Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that in Botswana, decentralized planning remained a national political priority within the period under study, and that the Government was committed to it. The inherited traditional kgotla system of democracy provided the framework within which citizen engagement in the policy process was actively promoted. Consequently, the engagement of citizens in Botswana has become part and parcel of the public policy making process. Information provision is a priority and 65,000 copies of one official newspaper were being distributed free daily during the period under study. National, district and village level consultative machineries exist, institutionalized and encouraged to be active, although there actual operations are not as effective as everyone would desire. However, Vision 2016 provides a ray of hope when it states that 'democracy must be extended down to the level of community in a way that allows ordinary people to see that their views have been freely sought and seriously received', and that 'there must be ownership and empowerment among the population' (Vision 2016, 1997).

Although some technologically-driven models of citizen engagement are yet to become operational in Botswana due mainly to the developmental level of the country, however going by government commitment to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in mainstream public sector organizations as well as at the secondary and tertiary levels of the educational system, there is hope that the future is bright in the application of more modern, effective and efficient tools of citizen engagement in Botswana.

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