

From Humble Beginning to Prosperity: Processes and Successes of Building Resilient Communities (Etsha Villages) Botswana Christian Council

Dama Mosweunyane

University of Botswana, Botswana

Cheneso Bolden Montsho

University of Botswana, Botswana

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the role that the Botswana Christian council served to empower the marginalised population of Etsha villages. A distinctive feature of the empowerment processes in this case was a 'collective and inclusive' principle. Collectiveness and inclusiveness implies that people at the grassroots levels were actively involved. Perhaps this involvement was particularly facilitated by the fact that the villagers used what they were familiar with, natural resources and indigenous expertise. This project constituted a major strategy for promoting sustainable development and empowering local communities to make use of local resources for their economic empowerment. Indeed, the case illustrated that the Etsha villages' transformation/empowerment was realised through this project. They attracted monetary rewards from their production of handicrafts and services offered through the museum. These villages gained not only economically, they even transformed the processes of decision-making, which is one of the key aspects of political empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter illustrates the efforts of the Botswana Christian Council (BCC) in transforming Etsha villages into productive citizens; religiously, economically, politically and socially. An analysis of the empowerment model used reveals that ideas were borrowed much from Oxfam's (2012) concept of empowerment. Oxfam discusses five domains of empowerment namely: health, economy, politics, resources and spirituality. In the same manner, empowerment by BCC in Etsha resources focused on spiritual consciousness, economic prosperity and informed decision making. These were practices that were anchored on the prudent utilisation of natural resources. As evidenced by the interventions that were initiated by BCC in Etsha villages, it can be safely concluded that they are empowering. Empowerment is defined by Page and Czuba (1999) as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and their society, by acting on issues they define as important. In a nutshell, empowerment is about radical social transformation and economic capacity of individuals, classes and communities (Rowlands, 1995 and Beteille, 1999).

BACKGROUND TO THE BOTSWANA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL

The Botswana Christian council (BCC) is a non-profit making religious organisation, which is a longstanding partner of Global Ministries and is affiliated to the World Council of Churches. It was founded in 1966 and had 35 member churches and Christian organizations, which constitutes most of the churches in Botswana. As noted by BCC (1983) in 1966 on the 21st May four churches – Anglican, London Missionary Society (UCCSA) Methodist and United Free Church of Scotland met for the first time to inaugurate the council of churches in Botswana.

The Botswana Christian Council is committed to the principles of equality, justice and peace, which can be attributed to its participation in advocacy and development work. Although the Council started as a purely theological entity with few members, it has since broadened its scope and the membership has risen and continues growing across the country. Its portfolio of programs includes political education, information, youth work, children, refugee work and other issues relevant to women's status. It is this commitment that has led the BCC to get involved in community development work in Etsha villages in the Okavango area, which are made up of people who are refugees from Angola. It is important to note that BCC has been concerned with the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Botswana in their attempt to find a place of

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