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Organized Interest Groups, Development Strategies and Social Policies

*A Review of Poverty Reduction
and Policy Regimes in Botswana*

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Introduction

Today, any analysis of poverty in Botswana must invariably examine it as a problem that affects some sections of the national population. But at independence in 1966, poverty was a characteristic that defined the country as a whole: including particularly the emerging modern state which did not command even basic resources to cover its budgetary needs. Not surprisingly, therefore, Botswana's first attempt at poverty alleviation involved a strategy that focussed on aggregate income growth and not any specifically poor target group.

In the context of the post World War period the idea that nations could engineer development through resource mobilization, planning and allocation had become acceptable and in fact it was believed that such engineering could bring about world peace and prosperity. The American President, Woodrow Wilson, had sold this idea to the world when he proposed that the poor nations could be assisted out of their poverty by a transfer of resources accompanied by relinquishment of territorial colonies [Rist, 1997¹]. American academics like WW Rostow provided theoretical frameworks translating this idea into a set of propositions on how poor nations could be modernized. And the United Nations system turned these propositions into practical assistance programs with time frames that were packaged initially as the First Development Decade in the 1960s and made available to poor nations such as Botswana [Singer and Roy, 1993; Mason, 1997]².

Botswana entered state nation-hood in 1966 as one of the bottom poorest countries in the world and therefore a prime candidate for development assistance. In its eighty odd years under British protection it never generated enough meaningful wealth to justify full colonization and was thus administered with a skeletal structure at minimum cost to the colonizing power. This meant that unlike other colonial territories where some expenditure had been made towards developing the human capital, infrastructure and institutions that would form a base for future independent sovereignty, for Botswana the base was exceptionally low. A lot more challenges were to be met before this country could develop the institutional, infrastructural and human capital that would provide a base for sustainable growth. The story of how Botswana transformed itself from rags to riches, and from a legacy of colonial neglect to practical sovereignty as a viable modern state has been told many times and very ably by a string of scholars. It is not the intention of this paper to repeat it.

Suffice it to state that the development strategy that had initially focussed primarily on economic growth to reduce general poverty was soon tempered by concern over the fact

¹ Rist, Gilbert (1997) **The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith** (Zed Books: London and New York; UCT Press: Cape Town)

² Singer, Hans W and Sumit Roy (1993), **Economic progress and prospects in the Third World: Lessons of development Experience Since 1945** (Edward Elgar: Aldershot; Mason, Mike (1997), **Development and Disorder: A History of the Third World since 1945** (University Press of New England: Hanover and London)

that the resulting economic growth increased the incomes and wealth of some citizens while leaving out the vast majority of the population. Poverty increasingly came to be associated with lack of access to the modern economy by certain vulnerable groups such as subsistence farmers, the non-waged, women, rural populations, those living in remote and small settlements, etc. This necessitated a policy shift towards development programs that directly targeted the productive capacity of the vulnerable groups in order to raise their personal income and wealth. And as national wealth further improved, another major policy shift in policy resulted in embracing the notion of social protection and welfare. This particularly targeted those vulnerable groups deemed outside the reach of production related intervention programs. These included, for instance, orphans, the aged, the disabled and others lacking capability to graduate out of destitution.

The outcomes of the policies and strategies pursued over the entire independence period differed in their overall impact on poverty and income distribution. Happy Siphambe³ has noted that when measured in terms of just reduction of income poverty [ie from 59% in the 1980s approximately 30% this century], the policies could generally be classified as having been pro-poor. However, measured in terms of both poverty reduction and reduction in income inequalities, then only the period up to the early 1990s could still be classified as pro-poor because it reduced both income poverty and inequality rates. The period since the 1990s would fail the pro-poor test because the policies pursued resulted in increased inequalities while poverty reduction was achieved at a significantly lower rate than the rate of economic growth.

In this paper we examine the role that was played by organized interest groups in the choice of development strategy/social policy, and the associated outcomes in the extent of poverty reduction. Specifically this paper is intended to provide answers to six key questions on the role of Botswana's organized interest groups in economic and social policy development as well as poverty reduction. The questions are as follows:-

- What are the institutional arrangements that structure relations between the state and organized groups, including organized business, in pursuing development, social risk management and poverty reduction?
- Under what conditions have organized groups, acting separately and collectively, impacted development strategies and social policies?
- In what contexts are groups likely to accommodate or internalise goals of national development and macroeconomic stability in their policy preferences?
- To what extent have the interests of the unorganized poor been incorporated in the preferences of organized groups and in public policy?
- Have organized groups been able to construct effective links with political parties to influence the direction of social policy and poverty reduction strategies?
- And how have different groups coped with pressures for neo-liberal policy reform in advancing group welfare?

³ Happy Siphambe, 2007, "Development Strategies and Poverty Reduction in Botswana". Draft paper for the UNRISD study on Poverty Reduction and Policy Regimes.

These questions are examined with the ultimate goal of providing a basis for comparative analysis between this country case study and other country case studies that are part of a larger project seeking to establish, inter alia, the effects of such interests on policy and the reproduction, intensification or amelioration of poverty. The comparative project seeks to contribute to debates and policy on poverty reduction by examining the role of social policy and the relationships among various types of policy regimes and institutions. The project has drawn on the lessons of research on social policy by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) to highlight some of the issues that need further investigation in order to facilitate better understanding of the concept of policy coherence and the ways in which policies and institutions might work more synergistically to promote inclusive and equitable development. A “policy regime” framework has been adopted for the country case studies and used to examine systematically the ways in which social policy, economic policy and the political/institutional context affect poverty reduction, and how they might be mutually reinforcing.

In this case study the key interest groups whose interaction with the state in public policy making is considered are those representing labour and employees on the one hand and those representing employers and business on the other as significant players in economic activity. These social actors are key players in the production process and the ones directly affected by economic and related public policy decisions. However, there are other significant social players who, while not directly involved in production, have nonetheless played an important role in articulating the interests particularly of less articulate and non-organized social groups. Their intervention in policy and institutional development will also be included in the examination. How and to what extent have these groups influenced policy? In turn how have policy regimes and different development strategies impacted on these interests groups?

The role of non-state interest groups in shaping the outcomes of development policies/programs and the nature/character of political organization and behaviour has received considerable research attention during the past two decades. The economic and political failures that visited many African countries during and since the era of structural adjustment and drastically deteriorating terms of trade for primary goods producers in the 1970s and 1980s, led to a critical examination of the role of both the state and civil society in the complex network of processes and agencies that created this state of affairs.

Goran Hyden [2000]⁴, for instance, while noting that the public realm is an arena in which both the state and civil society associations interact and compete for influence, also observed that in Africa, both the state and civil society have lacked capability to get things done: a state of affairs manifested “in the deteriorating conditions in which large groups of citizens ... find themselves as a result of both inadequate state performance in the past and the current frailty of non-governmental organizations” [Hyden, 2000: 8]. He argued that “Much of the crisis that Africa has gone through for almost two decades now

⁴ Goran Hyden [2000] “ the Governance Challenge in Africa” In Goran Hyden, Dele Olowu and Hastings Okoth-Ogendo [eds] **African Perspectives on Governance** [Africa World Press, Trenton and Asmara]

(with no end insight) can be attributed ... to an inadequate performance at policy level” [Hyden, 200:17].

Botswana has received particular scholarly interest as an African exceptional case whose economic and policy performance has given the state a level of legitimacy and practical sovereignty that has not been enjoyed by most other post-colonial African countries. And yet the available literature generated by studies on Botswana would suggest that policy performance and the dramatic transformations that have seen this country rise from the ranks of the world’s poorest to a middle income economy have happened in the context of a weak civil society. Specifically, Botswana’s organized interests groups are adjudged by most of the existing literature as fairly weak, of recent development, and having historically played an insignificant role in development policy and strategy. For instance, on the basis of a study they conducted in 1991, and using the criterion of the ability of organizational leaders “to exercise influence over government on behalf of their members”, Holm and Molutsi (1992; 85) and Holm, Molutsi and Somolekae (1996; 43) observed that there was a lack of robust interest group activity and limited challenge to policy up till the 1990s. What then influenced public policy and how does that explain the nature, character and direction of poverty in Botswana?

Holm, Molutsi and Somolekae (1996; 48) further argue that even when the early interest groups emerged, none had much impact on government policy unless top officials saw some benefit to be gained from them in terms of citizen mobilization. And still further, that development programs that occurred did not do so on account of organized social group support for them, but rather as a result of inter-ministerial competition for the expanding government income provided by the diamond industry. However, elite interests have also been consistently identified as having played quite a significant role in shaping choice in development policy and strategy. How did these interests get articulated and reflected in policy? Deborah Brautigam, [2000: p19], suggests, in relation to the commercial cattle interests and their impact on the liberal trading policy, that the influence was probably through informal channels as “there is little evidence that this influence operated through organized interest associations.” What accounts for informal channels taking precedence over the formal?

Other observers [notably Parson, 1981; Charlton, 1991; Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, 2001] identified the coincidence of the membership of commercial cattle interests with that of the policy-making political and bureaucratic leadership as ensuring that the private interests of these individuals were reflected in policy decision making through their dual membership: thus presumably obviating the need for the formation of a separate, non-state forum to articulate private interests. Tsie (1996; p606), notes however that since the 1970s, the employers’ organization [firstly as Botswana Employers’ Federation and later as Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower, BOCCIM] has been influential in the formulation of wages, employment and incomes policy as well as labour legislation while organizations representing labour have had relatively less influence. In more recent years, there has been increasing

acknowledgement that organized interests are making significant impact on policy [see for instance, Land⁵, 2002; Woolcock, 2001⁶, Herzberg and Wright, 2005⁷].

What explains the apparent ineffectuality of organized interests before the 1990s, given that some of these pre-date independence? And, more importantly, what has changed to make organized interest groups more effectual in policy making in recent times? These are some of the questions this paper addresses in attempting to answer the key questions stated at the beginning of this introduction. We start by examining the evolution and character of the institutional structures that have framed and in turn been shaped by the interaction between the state and organized interests.

Institutional Structures and State-Organized Interest Groups Relations

Undoubtedly, among all the national actors and institutions, the state has played the key most significant role in both the economic transformation of Botswana and the development of the political and economic institutions that have characterized the history of this nation since independence. It is therefore very tempting in the context of such state dominance, to dismiss the role of non-state interventions as inconsequential in explaining both the evolution of policy and the institutional structures that came to frame relations between state and society in the public realm. Further, quite often political observers take the existence of a powerful state for granted and do not examine how it too had to develop institutionally to the point where it would be a dominant force: particularly the modern state. But we cannot adequately comprehend the contours and outcomes of institutional development without taking serious account of the evolution of both the state and the organized interests and the dynamic interactions that shaped the outcomes of the relationship.

To that end this paper will examine these interactions between state and autonomous organizations in terms of three epochs. The first, which we term the era of trade union autonomy, roughly covers the late colonial administration up to early independence [roughly the 1940s to 1970]. In this era labour could organize and recruit members with relative autonomy from the state and without much legal administrative restriction on which workers to recruit within the rather small, racially segregated labour markets. The second era is the period of controlled industrial relations when the new government, following on the footsteps of early independent African states, tightened control over

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