

**An Appraisal of Batswana Extension Agents'
Work and Training Experiences:
Towards Enhanced Service Coordination**

by
Rebecca Nthogo Lekoko

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The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
College of Education

**AN APPRAISAL OF BATSWANA EXTENSION AGENTS' WORK AND
TRAINING EXPERIENCES:
TOWARDS ENHANCED SERVICE COORDINATION**

A Thesis in
Adult Education
by
Rebecca Nthogo Lekoko

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for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

A hermeneutic-phenomenological interviewing was conducted to explore CBEWs' previous work and training experiences and how such experiences contributed to their present working relationships as partners in community development. CBEWs' responses foreshadowed challenges and problems of coordination that could have otherwise been addressed had they been considered integral elements of previous training curricula. The findings further throw light on how government policies, though explicitly formulated to enhance conditions of service coordination, can be in variance with realities of coordination at the village level. Awareness of the fissure of policies and actual coordination does not refute the importance of government intervention in community development, given CBEWs' status as government employees. Rather, it is only with understanding of and familiarity with CBEWs' circumstances that such policies would truly address the challenges, problems, and possibilities of effective coordination.

CBEWs' comments reflected both awareness and learned understanding of social and political complexities surrounding their work as partners in community development. Authority and interventions such as political interference, illiterate communities, enlightened communities, passive, and negative attitudes complicate their working together, resulting into problems of resistance, rejection, and other tensions that defeat the spirit of working together. Meaningful acceptance of community development as a collective undertaking needs to be backed by a deliberate unification of CBEWs through a centrally organized training. Such training programs must not only illuminate the lived experiences of CBEWs as they work among themselves and with other community-based groups in the villages, but also provide opportunities for CBEWs to take active roles by engaging in activities such as placements in authentic work settings, mini-interdisciplinary groupings of CBEWs with local communities, and other team activities. There will be no end to the reservoir of learning if intentional efforts are made to incorporate local knowledge and needs, that is, immediate challenges, problems, and needs of CBEWs as they work with the local communities.

Beside, effective coordination requires basic skills of communication, leadership and management, personal and human relations, technical skills and relevant attitudinal orientations.

The features describes here are not exhaustive, but have in common the intent of making training programs truly sensitive to CBEWs' needs as partners in community development.

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Ian deserves special thanks not just as my advisor but a family friend. His friendship has been reflected through his tolerance, helping-hand, and encouragement especially during hard times as a single parent of a teenage boy and international student far from immediate family members.

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been a source of reference. As a friend, it has been great sharing the happy and difficult times of my field-work.

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A strong source of encouragement is my family, whose support has been unwavering, unquestionable, and comforting. I am now comfortably positioned to respond to my parents' persistent question, "When are you coming home?" Soon.

DEDICATION

To my late sister, Akanyang, whose time in this world was too short to rejoice with me in my new academic achievement.

And

To my son, Mphoentle, whose very being remains a challenge, an inspiration, and motivation to better all aspects of my life.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Overview of the Chapter

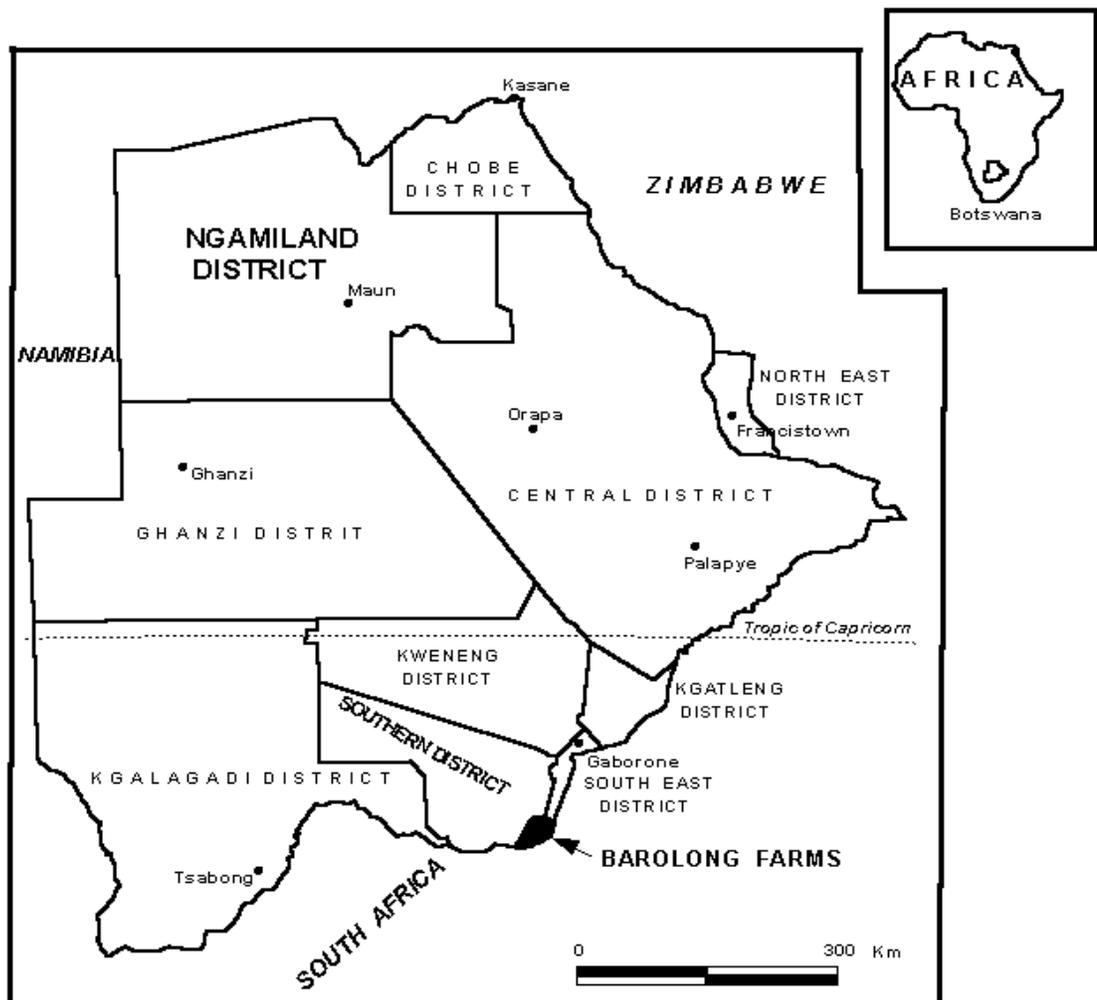
This study was designed to explore Batswana community-based extension agents' work and previous training experiences as they relate to their working relationships as partners in the community. The background personal experiences and knowledge that led to the investigation of the phenomenon and the goal for this study are outlined in this chapter. Also, the overarching question that guided collection of data is presented in this chapter. Readers are also introduced to the main constructs of this study, -- coordination, training, and community development, in a section that introduces the problem of this study.

1.2. The Setting of the Study

The fieldwork and preliminary analysis for this study were carried out in Botswana. The specific settings from which the respondents were drawn are Lobatse (a township), and five urban villages: Mahalapye and Palapye, in Central district; Mochudi (including Sikwane and Rasesa), in Kgatleng district; Molepolole, in Kweneng district; and Ramotswa, in South East district. In these locations, the main home language is Setswana.

English is the official language and was spoken well by participants in this study. The participants are conversant in two languages: Setswana and English. During interviewing, participants were free to use these languages as they normally do in their day-to-day conversation. The map that follows shows, among other things, the districts.

Figure 1: Map of Botswana



Within each district, there are a number of villages. Community-based extension workers (CBEWs) reside and work in these villages. CBEWs are a cadre of the extension staff. Basically, the extension staff is composed of government employees from different extension sectors who take lead roles in the provision and creation of basic social services of education, health, food, and social welfare. In the context of this study, therefore, the CBEWs are a cadre composed of social workers, community development officers, agricultural officers, rural area development officers (RADOs), information, education, and communication (IEC) officers, cooperative officers, and health officers, all working in the districts of Botswana. They provide services, such as family welfare activities, destitute schemes, counseling, orphanage, and self-help projects, in a coordinated manner. Overall, community development is considered a joint effort of the government with interested non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector groups, community-based organizations (CBOs), voluntary organizations, parastatals, and local communities in initiating and carrying out projects to develop local communities.

Overall, the population of Botswana was estimated at 1,586,119 in July 2001, giving the country an overall population density of 2.7 persons per sq km (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bc.html>).

However, the preliminary results brief of the 2001 Population and Housing Census conducted in August 2001 indicates that the actual population number may be slightly lower than the projected figure (Census Officer, 2001). Approximately 29% of the population of Botswana lives in the towns while the majority of the people live and work in the districts

(<http://encarta.msn.com/index/conciseindex/50/05002000.htm?z=1&pg=2&br=1#s2>). District population varies substantially across the districts, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Population Distribution by Selected Districts

| District Name | Village Name | Projected Population (2001) | Annual Growth (1991-2001) |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Kweneng | Molepolole | 54, 124 | 3.90 |
| Central | Mahalapye | 39, 574 | 3.49 |
| | Palapye | 25, 526 | 3.93 |
| Kgatleng | Mochudi | 36, 591 | 3.66 |
| South East | Ramotswa | 24, 130 | 2.59 |
| Township | Lobatse | 32, 864 | 2.61 |

Source: 2001 Population and Housing Census Preliminary Result Brief.



The table shows projected but not actual figures.

1.3. Researcher's Experiences

I bring an insider's perspective to this study as a citizen of Botswana, born, raised, and educated in the country. My elementary schooling was started and completed in the urban village of Tlokweng in the South East district, where I was born and grew up. As part of the normal maturation of a villager in Botswana, I was exposed to and involved in some development activities, such as fund-raising activities and self-help projects, both in school and those based on traditional ways of living together. I am, therefore, familiar with some development activities in the urban village setting, a setting similar to the ones in which the CBEWs interviewed for this study operate. My high school and undergraduate programs were completed in Gaborone, the main city, and a place where I work as an adult educator. The aforementioned background experiences familiarized me with development policies of the country and afforded me a close working relationship with community-based extension workers.

Familiarity and respect for cultural etiquette were also important aspects of my preparedness. For example, an exchange of greetings in Botswana is a type of gesture that facilitates good rapport and establishes a bond common between people during discussion. One tendency among some Batswana is to use greetings to open up for long friendly discussions. Because of my previous

contacts with some community-based extension workers, having a friendly chat was unavoidable. Occasionally, before interviewing, we talked about our health, families, professional development, and progress. I carefully got involved in the discussion and waited for that moment when a go-ahead signal came, such as silence signaling the end of a conversation. Then, I began interviewing. In turn, I obtained the interest and the patience of the participants.

Furthermore, it is customary in some Setswana cultures to accompany the arrival and welcoming of a visitor with an act of goodwill, such as offering food (meal or tea); in the qualitative research process, this act is part of the texture of interviewing (Mathieson, 1999). Mathieson refers to situations such as invitation to coffee, tea, or dinner as “social situations that emerge as adjuncts to the interviewing context” (p. 128). When tea and snacks were offered, I stopped interviewing, took tea, and engaged in some casual talk with participants. I was aware of possible consequences of not cooperating with respondents. For example, I might have been considered “*Ga a na botho*” (lacking in “*botho*”). In the Setswana culture, “*botho*” gives the concept of a person who is friendly, “well mannered, courteous and disciplined” (Botswana Presidential Task Force, 1997, p. 4). Values, such as those embodied in the concept “*botho*,” cannot be ignored in situations where the support and cooperation of the local people are needed. Being familiar with the culture of the respondents, therefore, facilitated collection of rich data.