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INVISIBLE UPKEEP

**Local Institutions and Democratisation of Development
in Botswana: A Case Study of Village Development
Committees in Ngamiland**

**By
Barbara Ntombi Ngwenya**

Bay Publishing

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
<i>Part One: Research Development</i>	
Introduction	9
Objectives	12
Organisation	12
Chapter 1 - Village Development Committees in Botswana: An historical Context	13
1.1. Democracy in Botswana	14
1.2. Conceptual Issues	15
1.2.1. Livelihoods and Local Institutions	15
1.2.2. VDCs and Local Institutions	17
1.2.3. Institutional Capacity	19
1.3. VDCs and Administration of Development	19
1.4. Summary	22
Chapter 2 - Research Setting and Methodology	24
2.0. Research Area	24
2.1. Research Sites	25
2.2. Data Collection Methods	28
2.2.1. Focus Group Seminars	28
2.2.2. Structured Individual Interviews	29
2.2.3. Semi-Structured Interviews and Participant Observation	30
2.3. Data Analysis	30
2.3.1. Cultural Analysis	30
2.3.2. Comparative Analysis	30
2.3.3. Gender Analysis	30
<i>Part Two: Research Findings</i>	
Chapter 3. - VDC Structure, Participation, and Villagisation	31
3.1. Internal Participatory Dynamics in VDCs	33
3.2. The Dynamics of Office Tenure and Alliance	39
3.3. Opening up Spaces for Negotiating and Modifying the Official Script	40
3.4. Performance Incentives or a Tragedy?	41
3.5. Summary	44
Chapter 4 - Mediating Access to Natural Resources and Social Services	46
4.1. Access to Natural Resources	46
4.1.1. Access to Water	47
4.1.2. Access to Land	48
4.1.3. Control of Bush Fires, Harvesting of Veld Products, and Solid Waste Management	48

4.2. Access to Social Services	49
4.2.1. Health	49
4.2.2. Social Welfare Benefits	50
4.2.3. Household Well-being and Poverty	52
4.2.4. Education	54
4.2.5. Telecommunication and Public Transport	56
4.3. Summary	57
Chapter 5 - Village Parliament Institutional Relations	59
5.1. VDCs and Districts: Schizophrenic Relations	59
5.2. VDCs and NGOs	60
5.2.1. NGO Relations	60
5.2.2. VDC, Partisan Politics and CBOs	61
5.2.3. VDCs Relations with Village Level Institutions	62
5.2.4. The Chief and Kgotla	64
5.3. Democracy at the Kgotla?	66
5.3.1. Secret Ballot vs Open Kgotla Election	66
5.3.2. VDC and Leadership Development	67
5.4. VDCs and Community Trusts	68
5.5. Summary	69
Chapter 6 - VDCs, Development, Change and Resilience	71
6.1. VDCs, Development, Change and Resilience	71
6.2. Village Specific Development Decades	71
6.3. Participatory District Development Planning	74
6.4. Constraints and Threats	75
6.5. VDC vs Financial Capital	76
6.6. VDC and District Development Plans	76
Chapter 7 - Future Prospects, Challenges and Conclusion	77
7.1. Challenges	77
7.2. A Way Forward	79
References	80

Executive Summary

Communities and households in Ngamiland District rely heavily on the biodiversity of natural resources in the Okavango Delta, which is central to the sustenance of their livelihoods. Institutions influence the choices communities/households can make about using these assets. In Botswana, like in any other society, institutions have a significant impact on community life. They exercise authority through rules and regulations that determine who is eligible to have access to and control over resources (natural or non-natural based). In general, there are three main types of institutional structures in society. These are the public sector (central, district and local), private enterprises (producing goods and services for profit through market exchange mechanisms), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). State formal institutions have statutory powers and are ultimately responsible for the distribution of public goods and services to citizens. This research monograph uses a case study of Ngamiland District in northwestern Botswana to explore the democratisation of development and its upkeep (management) by Village Development Committees (VDC) in six villages, namely Gudigwa, Seronga, Etsha 6, Gumare, Sehitwa and Maun. A VDC is defined as a locality-based community institution that has been established by a presidential decree to legitimise/authorise participation by ordinary Batswana in the implementation of the country's decentralised development programmes. VDCs in Botswana are more or less as old as the country's liberal democracy. The institution is non-statutory and consists of non-salaried members. Currently, Ngamiland has 55 functioning VDCs in gazetted villages: Ngami Sub-District has 30, whereas Okavango Sub-District has 25. Rural, remote and urban villages in Botswana constitute an important component of the development administration infrastructure. VDCs are embedded in a network of pre-colonial structures (kgotla and chieftainship) and a post-independence institutional framework that govern the country's development interventions (policies and programmes).

The overall objective of this research monograph is to give a historical overview of the ways in which VDC practices contribute towards the management and democratisation of development programmes/projects at village level within the broader context of decentralised administration of development programmes in Botswana. The objectives of the study are to:

- Explore ways in which VDCs mediate access to specific resources and services for various social groups in Ngamiland.
- Highlight the significance of VDC intervention in the context of decentralised management of rural development programmes.
- Explore socio-cultural issues of participation in VDCs.
- Investigate the ways in which VDCs take into account the aspirations of particularly disadvantaged social groups in society.
- Explore village level institutional relations, practices and dynamics.
- Investigate ways in which VDC participation in local development contributes to representative democracy.

Research Findings

- The VDC formal structure has been standardised over the past four decades. While some aspects remain prescribed, such as official membership, the duration of tenure and the performance of official functions, others have been reviewed.

- In Ngamiland, 50% of the population lives in non-gazetted settlements and is therefore not entitled to social services in accordance with the National Settlement Policy (NSP). However, some residents of small localities (meraka or masimo) begin a process of “villagisation” by organising “Action VDCs” to encourage more people to settle permanently, appoint a chief/headman, and have their village officially gazetted as a settlement. Although these micro-practices are virtually invisible, by expanding access to resources and services to remote villages these VDCs represent self-empowering practices, and citizen participation in the context of the statutory dominance of development by centralised institutions.
- VDC members are “average” Batswana. The institution is gendered. Internal gender dynamics in VDCs reflect some aspects of the redefinition of gender relations, trade-offs, compromise and negotiation. Men and women in VDCs use different gendered strategies to “gain entry” and negotiate access to resources from formal institutions.
- VDCs have low human capital development. This capital is however a shared community, rather than a strictly individual, resource. VDCs are also learning institutions with a potential to expand human capital development.
- VDCs reflect diversity (age, gender, education and ethnicity). Concerted effort is made to mediate these differences.
- Some VDCs are highly functional and democratic, while others are dysfunctional, ageist, sexist, ethnocentric, isolationist and undemocratic.
- There was consensus that VDC members should be salaried for their work.
- A VDC has no statutory mandate to allocate natural resources (water, land, forest, wildlife, fauna and flora). However, some community based natural resource management (CBNRM) constitutions in Ngamiland provide either for the VDC chair-person and secretary, or the entire VDC, to be *ex officio* members of their Village Trust Committees (VTCs) or Boards of Trustees.
- Although the Government of Botswana has expanded people’s access to social services by stepping up investment spending, the incidence of poverty in Botswana is still high. VDCs have a long history of working with social workers to address social welfare issues of vulnerable social groups such as the elderly, disadvantaged children, the disabled and the chronically ill in their communities.
- Overall, the institutional relations between VDCs, kgotla/chiefs and district councils are a bit muddled, and loyalties are divided. It is therefore not surprising that these relations range from supportive to adversarial depending on the situation.
- One major drawback is that VDCs have limited (if any) working relations with NGOs and none with the private sector.
- Although VDCs shy away from openly expressing partisan politics, some members are cardholders of various political parties.
- Individual interviews indicate that a significant proportion (91%) of VDC members are also active members of other formal and informal village-level institutions that focus on cultural or

social welfare issues. This implies that VDCs have a strong but under-utilised social capital base built on informal community support networks.

- VDCs were unanimous in their acknowledgement of the centrality of the kgotla in community life, and the chief consults them on development activities in the village. All VDCs in the study areas have called a kgotla meeting for one reason or another. Again, VDCs have a strong cultural capital but remain weak politically.
- Although the government is the primary funding initiator for VDC development projects, some VDCs have become experts in negotiating for government to fund projects identified as priorities by their respective communities.
- Over the years VDC have accumulated an inventory of assets, in particular physical. These include houses, pre-schools, offices and business premises for rent, construction facilities (brick moulding machines) and business equipment (such as catering tables, chairs, large cooking pots, cutlery and so on).
- However, VDCs have been unable to use physical capital to generate other forms of capital - especially financial (cash income from, for example, housing or equipment rentals).
- The VDC capital/asset pentagon thus remains highly skewed, in part because of either poor accounting/bookkeeping procedures or a lack of business management skills and a low level of literacy and access to finance/credit. Conflict between government and VDCs regarding ownership and control of VDC houses has also contributed to the institution's inability to use its physical capital to generate financial capital.
- Resource constraints notwithstanding, VDCs are critical elements of Botswana's democracy. They contribute to a certain democratic quality, as they allow citizens who would otherwise be more disenfranchised to learn about the democratic process and to raise questions of quality regarding democracy and good governance. VDCs provide space for the democratisation of development, and for resolving rather than "freezing" potential conflicts that may harden along social divisions (cultural, religious, gender and the like).
- The institutional capacity of VDCs is a function of resources at their disposal. VDCs should be salaried and empowered statutorily to initiate, prioritise and coordinate implementation of community projects.

Introduction

In general, community/household access to livelihood resources can be measured by the presence (or absence) of various forms of capital or assets (natural and non-natural based). Communities/households in Ngamiland District rely heavily on biodiversity of natural resources in the Okavango Delta which is central to the sustenance of their livelihood. Institutions influence the choices communities/households can make about using these assets. In Botswana, like in any other society, institutions have a significant impact on community life. They exercise authority through rules and regulations that determine who is eligible to have access and control over what resources (natural or non-natural based). In general, there are three main types of institutional structure in society. These are the public sector (central, district and local), private enterprises (producing goods and services for profit through market exchange mechanisms), and non-government organisations (NGOs). State formal institutions have statutory powers and are ultimately responsible for the distribution of public goods and services to citizens.

There are two categories of village-level institutions (VLIs) in contemporary Botswana. The first cluster consists of traditional institutions (so called because of their pre-colonial origin) comprising the customary court (kgotla), chieftaincy (bogosi) and village wards. The second cluster consists of “modern” VLIs which were invented after Botswana gained political independence from British colonial rule (1885-1966). These include, but are not limited to, Village Development Committees (VDCs), Village Health Teams (VHT), Village Trust Committees (VTCs), Village Literacy Committees and Farmers Committees (FCs), Village Extension Teams (VETs), and (in response to the emergence in the 1990s of the HIV/AIDS pandemic) Village Multisectoral AIDS Committees (VMSAC). This report will focus on the VDCs which were established by a Presidential directive in 1968 for purposes of implementing and coordinating development programmes and other village-level initiatives. VDCs are responsible to the kgotla for matters related to development, and liaise with other village- or district-level institutions.

As a traditional institution, the kgotla has been defined as a meeting place as well as a gathering of people to discuss and deliberate matters pertaining to the welfare of the entire community (morafe) (Mgadla and Campbell, 1989). The kgotla has also been defined as a public meeting place in the chief’s courtyard where public issues are discussed (Peters, 1995). The kgotla also serves as a community council assembly or traditional law court of a Botswana village. As a loan word, kgotla in ‘anglicised’ Setswana (the language of Batswana, the people of Botswana) means ‘court’ and can also refer to a place where meetings are held, ranging from a few chairs under a shade canopy to a permanent area of land (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kgotla>). It is at the kgotla that customary law limits the powers of village leaders and provides space for members of the community to participate in decision-making processes (<http://www.izania.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-739>). Historically, the kgotla was a gathering place for male adults to consider issues raised by the chief (kgosi) or local headman. Women, young males and ethnic minority groups who did not have commoner status were not expected to contribute (Schapera, 1970:56-82). However, the roles of both the kgotla and the kgosi have been transformed when tribal reserves during the colonial era became administrative districts (in the post-colonial period), from exclusive to relative degrees of inclusive participation of citizens across age, gender and ethnicity lines. In contemporary Botswana, kgotla debates focus on non-partisan local policy/programme implementation, and, although there is a tradition that all points of view must be heard, kgotla participants criticise government in a partisan manner (Molutsi and Holm, 1990: 328). The concept of kgotla defined holistically and philosophically is essentially humanistic, akin to botho/ubuntu (civility) for

fostering inclusive, consensus-building relationships and interactions (De Liefde, 2003:4; Khoza, 2004:5).

The role of chieftainship in the context of customary law in the colonial past and in post independence Botswana is contested (Nyamjoh, 2003; Werbner, 2002; Selolwane, 2005). However, regardless of differences in theoretical analysis, what is apparent is that, in contemporary Botswana, both chieftainship and the kgotla system have demonstrated remarkable flexibility and capacity to adapt to emerging political, cultural and economic development challenges. Prevailing institutional limitations notwithstanding, both traditional and non-traditional VLIs have galvanised some degree of legitimacy in the public domain. The moral/cultural authority of chiefs and the kgotla has survived, and continues to survive, the onslaught of a multitude of benevolent and malevolent users, in both colonial and post-colonial Tswana society. The kgotla's moral high ground, as a traditional institution, has to some extent been derived from the ability of the forum to provide real or imagined collective (as opposed to individual) space for mediation and negotiation of potential political dissent or confrontation as well as in creating possibilities for negotiating access to a range of resources (natural and non-natural) by ordinary citizens. Both traditional and modern village-level institutions continuously re-invent themselves as relevant institutions in the post-independence political dispensation. As Nyamjoh (2003) puts it, the kgotla and chieftaincy, whether or not perceived as re-invented, distorted or appropriated, remains part of Botswana's political landscape. These institutions are constantly renegotiating new socio-economic and political realities. Civil servants, politicians, intellectuals and academics all search for some cultural recognition around customary ideas of leadership and the chieftaincy.

'Modern' VLIs, such as VDCs, were (and still are) part of the government effort to increase productivity and the cost effectiveness of public sector developments by bringing these closer to the people as consumers of services. The extent to which this endeavour has succeeded or fallen short is open to empirical investigation. What is apparent, however, is that, in contemporary Botswana, Village Development Committees have been in existence since the country's independence, and together with the kgotla have a pervasive influence in village everyday life. These VLIs have become part of the process of democratising development by promoting and enforcing, directly or indirectly, accountability. The kgotla and the VDC should not be juxtaposed in a binary fashion, but rather these should be drawn in a continuum as reflecting different capabilities and mandates.

After Independence, nation-building efforts called for the decentralisation of the delivery of public services in order to make them efficient and productive. The process of decentralisation in Botswana was adopted under a liberal democratic system of government, and has been a part of a government public policy since Independence. The government White Paper No 21/1964 emphasised the need for constitutional development at the centre that is balanced by the growth of democratic institutions throughout the country. Successive National Development Plans (NDPs), therefore, have tended to support the government's decentralisation agenda. Decentralisation refers to the transfer of authority, responsibility, decision-making, planning, management or resource allocation from central government to its field units (these are district administrative units) (Lekorwe, 2000). Botswana's local government system, based on representative democracy, has been successful, although not necessarily satisfactory (Lekorwe, 2000) or flawless. The main emphasis is on responsiveness and accountability.

This research report uses a case study of Ngamiland District in northwestern Botswana to explore the democratisation of development and its upkeep (management) by Village Development Committees in six villages, namely Gudigwa, Seronga, Etsha 6, Gumare, Sehitwa and Maun (see Map 1, p. 26). In this report, a VDC is defined as a locality/village-based non-statutory institution

that has been established by a presidential decree to legitimise participation by ordinary Batswana in the implementation of the country's decentralised development programmes/projects. Because no single actor, public or private, has the resource capacity or authority to tackle development problems unilaterally, VDCs are embedded in a pre-colonial network (kgotla and chieftainship) and post-independence institutional framework that govern the country's development interventions (policies and programmes). Since resources are limited, participation and cooperation of a network of institutions and actors in government, civil society and private organisations is necessary in order to address problems of managing the delivery of public goods to citizens. In practice, this means that the higher the number of participants, the more complex the relationships. Each organisation has its own agenda, preferences, working norms and routine.

VDCs were selected for the case study because, firstly, VDCs are often critical - especially in rural villages where they facilitate access to public goods (natural and non-resource based) enjoyed by urban centres. Secondly, VDCs are at the lowest level of 'modern' public sector local institutions. Thirdly, VDCs have been in existence since the country's independence, and together with the kgotla and chieftainship, have a pervasive influence in the everyday life of villagers. Fourthly, by facilitating access to various forms of capital (natural, human, social and financial), VDCs contribute to community capacity-building. Village-level institutions (VLIs) are primarily non-statutory and therefore mediate and/or advocate for access to resources and services on behalf of their communities. Fifthly, pre- and post-independence VLIs co-exist, and are characterised by different institutional attributes that vary in a continuum of visibility/invisibility, legality/legitimacy, formality/informality, and vastness of geographical space (Messers and Townsley, 2003). Some VLIs are complementary while others are locked in adversarial and/or competitive relationships.

Lastly, local institutions such as VDCs influence community/household livelihood strategies that are at the core of people-centred development. These institutions, whatever their characteristics, cannot be taken at face value. There is a need to understand what goes on 'beneath the surface'. Unfortunately, development workers tend to pay attention to relatively formal and visible institutions with clearly stated objectives, yet these institutions often overlap with the informal and invisible.

The fundamental challenge for the democratisation of development is the building of key institutions of democratic governance. The globalising world has magnified the differences between and among peoples and nations. Indicators of democratisation are complex and cannot capture all the transitions. The process is fragmented, involving small steps and large, moving forward and back. VDCs as an institution mediating the implementation of local development initiatives are no exception. Likewise, VDCs are less likely to become a panacea for ironing out development wrinkles or social engineering problems. Constraints and opportunities are to be expected. At times VDCs may challenge the marginalisation of their intervention, at other times they may acquiesce. Unequal power relations are embedded in the institutional framework mentioned above. However, it is assumed that VDCs as organisations are also able to exercise power, that is, members have the agency or capacity for collective action. Through collective action they can empower not only themselves but also their communities/households at village level in relation to other comparable institutions.

This case study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do VDCs contribute towards the democratisation of development and its upkeep (management)?
- How do VDCs function (what are old and emerging challenges), who participates and why?

- How are decisions made, who makes them, and how are issues of the ownership of development initiatives addressed?
- To what extent are VDCs socially inclusive (gender, education, ethnicity and age), and how do they mediate differences/conflict?
- How do VDCs expand, contract and negotiate their development mandate? What are the trade-offs, if any?
- To what extent are VDCs responsive to the welfare of vulnerable social groups in their communities?

Objectives

The overall objective of this research monograph is to give a historical overview of the ways in which VDC practices contribute towards the management and democratisation of development programmes/projects at village level within the broader context of decentralised administration development programmes in Botswana. The objectives of the study are to:

- Explore ways in which VDCs mediate access to specific resources and services for various social groups in Ngamiland.
- Highlight the significance of VDC intervention in the context of decentralised management of rural development programmes.
- Explore socio-cultural issues of participation in VDCs.
- Investigate the ways in which the democratisation of development by VDCs takes into account the aspirations of particularly disadvantaged social groups in society.
- Explore village level institutional relations, practices and dynamics.
- Investigate ways in which VDC participation in local development contributes to representative democracy.

Organisation

This research monograph is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One gives a brief historical overview of VDCs, explores conceptual issues, and situates VDCs in the context of the administration of development institutional relations. Chapter Two discusses the context of research and methodology. Chapter Three focuses on VDC structure, participation and the ‘villagisation’ of unofficial settlement. Chapter Four examines the role of VDCs in mediating access to natural resources and social services. Chapter Five gives an in-depth analysis of institutional relations (NGOs, CBOs, Community Trusts, political parties, and inter-VLI). Chapter Six is about change and resilience. And Chapter Seven looks at the future prospects of and challenges to VDCs.

Chapter 1 - Village Development Committees in Botswana: An historical Context

Botswana is a sparsely populated country in southern Africa, with a harsh climate, poor soils and a population of 1.7 million people. The country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1966. The average annual per capita income was US \$30 at Independence, placing Botswana among the poorest countries in the world (Harvey & Lewis, 1990). Against this background, a Presidential Directive was issued in 1976 for the creation of Village Development Committees (VDCs) as “the main institution charged with responsibility for community development activities within a village through participatory decision-making (Government of Botswana, 2001). VDCs in Botswana, therefore, are more or less as old as the country’s liberal democracy. The Presidential Directive authorised VDCs to implement self-initiated projects by securing funding from government and other sources. The institution is non-statutory and consists of non-salaried staff. Recommendations from various commissions to have VDCs salaried have been continuously rejected by government (Presidential Commission on Local Government Structures, 2002). However, members do receive a token sitting allowance.

Research about VDCs has been very limited, although the institution is one of the oldest post-independence local institutions in the country. Rollings (1973) undertook a study of the evolution of VDCs in Tutume in the Central District. In this study, Rollings observed that voluntary collective work geared at “modernising” the village was already under way prior to the arrival of an Assistant Community Development Officer (ACDO) from central government who was intended to act as a catalyst of village “development” (ditlhabologo). On arrival, however, the ACDO played the role of a birth-attendant of his own version of “modernisation” and sought to undermine and devalue, rather than uphold and affirm, local definitions of “modernity” (segompieno). In other words, the ACDO as an outsider, brought a preconceived agenda that often threatened to awaken hitherto latent inter-group conflict and competition for resources. Collaboration and interdependence within and among Tutume communities was partially restored and partially remained unstable. Rollings also observed that Tutume VDCs consisted mostly of men, a contingent of relatives (the largest proportion being that of the headman’s kinsmen, who he used as a means of promoting his ascendancy and asserting his authority in the village), and the village elite. VDC meetings were held at the kgotla, and - as in most Tswana villages - men dominated kgotla meetings, and hence the VDC development agenda tended to reflect a male bias.

In 1979, the Ngamiland Villages Planning Report (Ministry of Agriculture, 1979) was released. The purpose of the report was to examine the physical and social structure of each village, to assess the potential for development and to make recommendations for improvement. Childers, Stanley and Morgan (Ministry of Local Government and Lands, 1982) conducted a study of local institutions in the Ngamiland Communal First Development Area (CFDA), and observed that VDCs differ widely in their levels of organisation, planning and management capabilities. The authors noted that while some VDCs had an excellent working relationship with other village-level organisations such as the VET, VHC, BCW, YWCA and PTAs, others had fragile links. The nature of these relationships was in part due to differences in their levels of organisational and management capabilities, and in part due to the relationship between the chief and the community development worker. If the

latter had a good relationship with the chief, s/he was likely to be well received in the community. However, at the time, the authors did not study the institutional relations between the chief and the VDC on the one hand, and between the VDC and the community on the other.

Rankopo's (1996) case study demonstrates ways in which a VDC is a community participation structure, using Bokaa village in the Kgatleng District as an example. The case study looks at the provision of housing for primary school teachers and police officers to address the problem of a shortage of accommodation. The author argues that the implementation and deliberation of communal self-help was achieved through the process of *therisano* at the village *kgotla*. Rankopo (1996:43) defines *therisano* as "an extensive dialogue between villagers on matters of communal concern". Although the Rural Development Policy gives District Councils the statutory responsibility to provide accommodation to extension workers employed by district authorities, the provision of housing to public workers was undertaken by villagers as self-help projects (Ngwenya, 2002), a tradition that was continued by VDCs under government's policy of village "modernisation". In Kgatleng District, Brown et al (1982) also indicate that VDCs built houses for teachers and continued to do so for nurses and other community development workers. Rankopo (1996) asserts that in Bokaa village, women (over 60%) in VDCs formed the backbone of the social development drive. Asked why men were not active in the project, some respondents in Rankopo's focus groups suggested that men were involved in paid work, while others pointed to the fact that there was a general lack of understanding in the village about the significance of the project.

From these studies it appears that VDCs invariably have evolved around the notion of delivery and management of 'development' as a public good/service to households/communities, invariably defined for and by them, in the context of national programmes/projects which are, of necessity, broad and contradictory. VDCs grapple with local issues and attempt to address them in the context of national policies and a centralising institutional framework. VDCs provide space for specific on-the-ground formulation or interpretation of a given policy or programme. Village-level institutions, in particular, help create some degree of inclusiveness and thus help strengthen central-to-local government relations. It is, therefore, not surprising that local political processes in Botswana have been regarded as far more developed than in neighboring countries such as South Africa (Kerapeletswe and Moremi, 2001).

1.1. Democracy in Botswana

Botswana has one of the longest stable multi-party systems in Africa, anchored in regular elections held every five years. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (1990) concluded that Botswana was enjoying a reputation as the most democratic nation on the African continent. The country held its seventh general election in 2004, and local government is based on representative democracy. Critics of the system point to persistent poverty and social and political inequalities, a tarnished human rights record related to the retention of the death penalty, the criminalisation of gay sexual orientation, and ethnic injustice (Good, 1993; DITSHWANELO: The Botswana Centre for Human Rights, 1998). Furthermore, it has been argued that Botswana has built a limited democracy defined by the following characteristics: the same party winning all the national elections; the dominance of the state over business, labour and civil society; the prevention of opposition political parties from interacting directly with business, labour and civil society; the centralisation of development policy in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); and the inability of opposition parties to unseat the Botswana Democratic Party (no alternative government) (Maundeni, 2004; Kerapeletswe and Moremi, 2001:228). Weak

parliamentary opposition and increased fragmentation also contribute to the entrenchment of a single party monopoly of power (Maundeni, 2004). Concern has been expressed over the extent of Botswana's highly centralised government, its "authoritarian liberalism" and its tendency to "freeze" rather than resolve potential conflict, and to harden rather than tone down social divisions (cultural, religious, gender and the like) (Mokopakgosi and Molomo; 2000).

Disparaging arguments about weaknesses in Botswana's democracy notwithstanding, compared to other African countries, the country has performed particularly well in establishing a framework for the rule of law and a fairly decent human rights record (Otlhogile, 1997; Takirambude, 1995), and constitutionally guaranteed religious expression (Nsereko, 1992). In this context Botswana's local government system has been successful (Lekorwe, 2000; Mfundisi, 1998). However, as Bastian and Luckman (2003:1) have observed, it appears that democracy is Janus-faced. Botswana is no exception. On the one hand, democracies empower citizens by attempting to overcome social exclusion and encouraging them to contribute towards good governance. On the other hand, the process reinforces social inequalities, tends to penalise ethnic minorities, and can awaken dormant social conflicts.

Democratically elected governments may or may not open up spaces for democratic politics, and they may or may not be responsive to the demands of certain segments of society (ethnic minorities, women, the poor). Local institutions such as VDCs operate in specific socio-economic, historical and political contexts characterised by enduring interconnected contradictions of colonial and capitalist development. According to Luckham, Goetz and Kaldor (2003), democratic institutions flourish if supported by active and broadly based democratic politics. VDCs may or may not open up spaces for democratic participation; they may or may not be responsive to the demands of specific disadvantaged social groups in society; they may or may not facilitate ownership of development projects, whether these are internally or externally driven; they may or may not facilitate conflict resolution; they may or may not empower their members specifically and/or the villagers in general. Regardless of the prevailing contradictions embedded in democracy, including processes which attempt to democratise the central government-driven delivery of development as a public good, the VDCs nonetheless have value. This is because Botswana are increasingly experiencing increased levels of insecurity in a globalising world. Factors responsible for precipitating these anxieties are numerous and interlocking. These include *inter alia* chronic poverty and unemployment, economic down-turns, protracted droughts, hazardous floods, outbreaks of foot-and-mouth or cattle lung diseases, and the devastating impacts of the AIDS epidemic. There are government programmes in place designed to 'alleviate' social distress, the long-term development goal of which is to prevent living conditions from deteriorating into civil strife. VDCs, although at the lowest level of 'modern' local institutions, have a pervasive influence in village everyday life and remain critical, especially in rural villages where they facilitate access to public goods enjoyed by urban centres.

1.2. Conceptual Issues

1.2.1. Livelihoods and Local Institutions

Community livelihood resources are generally measured in terms of the presence (or absence) of various forms of capital or assets which include natural capital (renewable and non-renewable, biophysical resources), human capital (knowledge and skills within a population), "produced" capital (physical infrastructure, manufactured and financial resources), social capital (support networks) and "institutional" capital (public, private and NGO sector). VDC is an important aspect

of institutional capital which influences the choices communities can make about using assets to improve livelihoods. Communities along the Okavango River in Ngamiland District rely heavily on natural resources which are central to the sustenance of their livelihood. A livelihood is based upon assets that a household uses to achieve and sustain the well-being of its members. Community members combine their capabilities, skills and knowledge with different resources at their disposal to enable them to achieve the best possible livelihood. Different communities have access to a differing range of assets (Figure 1a). The balance among the different assets will affect the livelihood strategies households pursue at any particular time/season. Community assets can be thought of as a pentagon that could be relatively large, well balanced and regular. The base could be strong, small or distorted (where there is undue dependence on just a few assets) (Messer and Townsley, 2003) (Figure 1b).

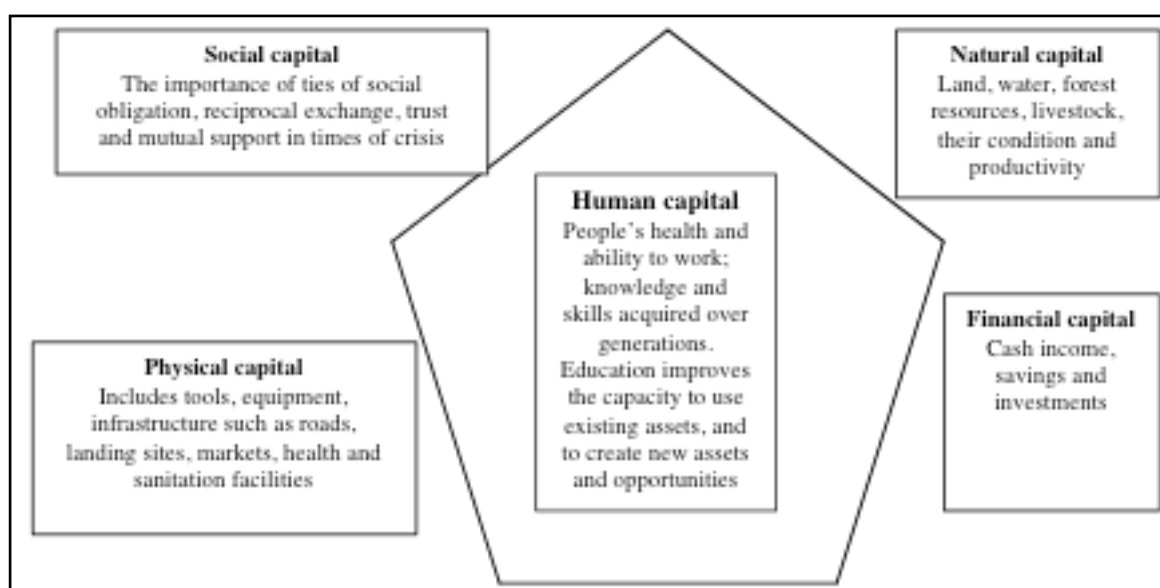


Figure 1a. Balanced Livelihood Assets Pentagon (adapted from Messer and Townsley, 2003).

Rural communities may have strong ties of kinship and mutual exchange to enable them to overcome episodes of vulnerability due to sickness and death, yet have weak financial or human capital due to limited access to education. The physical capital available to them may be appropriate to their local circumstances only, and unfamiliarity with, or lack of, financial capital many leave them at a disadvantage in market transactions. Communities/households may have labour capacity (HC - Human Capital) and are able to generate FC (Financial Capital), but have very limited access to natural capital, and have low levels of education and social status which ultimately weakens their social base. Livelihood pentagons are thus varied depending on the vulnerability context. Access to livelihood assets can be affected by factors that community/household members cannot control. These include seasonal changes (which reduce or increase the availability of different resources at different times of the year), long-term changes or trends (changes in population, environmental conditions and technology, patterns of governance and globalisation), and shocks (human-induced and natural disasters). Furthermore, institutions and policies may influence the choices communities/households can make about using these assets. Different government institutions (formal and informal), including VDCs, affect community/household decisions on how to make use of assets at their disposal. These institutions and social relations mediate resource access.

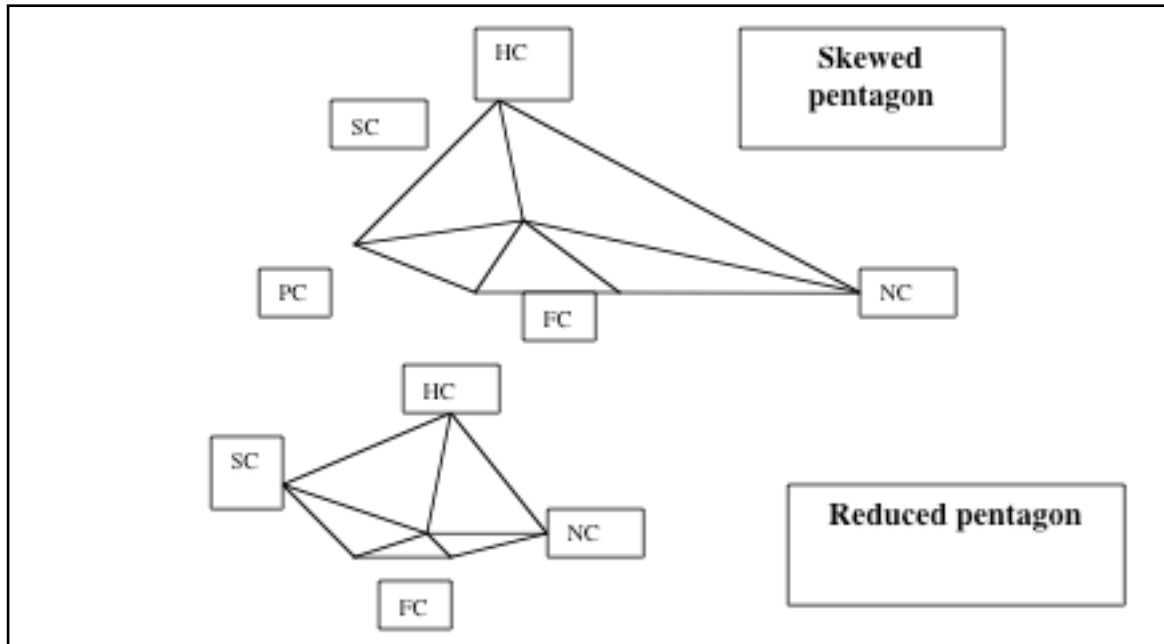


Figure 1b. Skewed Livelihood Asset Base.

1.2.2. VDCs and Local Institutions

Institutions are also processes that include a wide range of ‘arrangements’, which may be structured or unstructured, visible or invisible. In the introduction, a VDC is defined as a locality/village-based institution that has been established by a presidential decree to legitimise participation by ordinary Batswana in the implementation of the country’s decentralised development initiatives. The delivery of government public goods is a multi-layered institutional process, and, unavoidably, issues/questions around the equitable allocation and distribution of resources, especially in rural and urban areas, emerge. The relative success or failure of this endeavour depends, to a large extent, on the strength and/or weakness of local institutions. Total failure and/or collapse of these is likely to result in, among other things, exaggerated social exclusion. According to Narayan (1999), social exclusion refers to societal and institutional processes that exclude certain groups (either on the basis of gender, location, ethnicity or class) from participating in the social, economic, cultural and political life of a given society.

As already indicated in the introduction, VDCs have no statutory power to formulate or revise government policies and programmes. It should be noted that the mere existence of statutory institutions, however, does not necessarily guarantee democratic participatory practices. On the contrary, non-statutory institutions have an indirect and invisible input in policies and programmes sanctioned by central- and district-level institutions, especially through either decentralised planning processes embodied in District Development Plans (DDPs) and at the village level, or through the kgotla as a forum for public debate. Villag-level institutions, in particular, help create inclusiveness and strengthen central-local government relations. These characteristics ideally produce a conducive environment for the inclusive participation of ordinary citizens, and hence contribute to the consolidation of democracy. It is at the village level that ordinary people take government officials to task, especially during kgotla deliberations. The latter role of the kgotla is important as one avenue among others for the management of potential conflict, and one outcome of this process is that Botswana has never waged internal or external war, and has remained peaceful, politically stable and economically ‘successful’.

According to Grief (1994:943), institutions, be they formal or informal, have two interconnected elements - cultural beliefs (that is, how individuals expect others to behave in various contingencies) and organisational roles (internal human constructs that alter the rules of the game). Luckham, Goetz and Kaldor (2003:18) define an institution as a socially constructed arrangement of routinely exercised and accepted behaviour. VDCs, as social institutions, are likely to embody certain expectations about individuals that are embedded in certain cultural values, and their internal practices are likely to be based on prevailing and constructed rules as they organise themselves to compete for resources, legitimacy and accountability. Like any other social institution, VDCs are likely to uphold certain cultural beliefs dominant in society and adapt or reinvent a new ethos in constructing their organisational roles. In other words, they alter the 'rules of the game' in various ways. This is because institutions exercise authority through rules and regulations that determine who is eligible for what, and these regulations are legitimised through public sanction and acceptance, and are often legal or statutory (Narayan, 2000). According to Giddens (1984), institutional behaviour can be understood as a "set of rules in use". In the context of VDCs, their success or failure can be measured by their ability to use rules to increase local communities' level of access to resources and services.

According to Ribot (2003:ii), when central government formally cedes powers to institutions at lower levels of the political-administrative and territorial hierarchy, it is considered to be applying democratic decentralisation. The purpose of decentralisation is to increase public participation in local decision-making. The argument for decentralisation is that local government authorities are more likely to respond to local needs, since they have better access to local information. In the context of development, democratic decentralisation therefore is an institutionalised participatory approach that allows for flexibility and downward accountability. The intended benefits are improved efficiency, distributional equity, better opportunities for poor people, and increased access to services.

Ginn (1996 cited in Medel-Anonuevo and Miychell, 2003:xii) describes democratisation "as the participation of all people in framing and making decisions that affect them". Thus, democratisation can facilitate an analysis of how decisions are made regarding the distribution of resources in society. Democratisation can also be considered as a transitional process of moving society or institutions from traditional, bureaucratic, authoritarian management models to participatory, empowering and capacity-building approaches. For the purpose of this monograph, the democratisation of development entails people's opportunities to exercise their social, cultural, political and economic rights (as in the right to employment, education, and health care, and in having a decent place to live). It is an enabling environment that allows communities in a given locality to exercise control and authority over their development affairs, with limited state intrusion or interference. It entails a state of affairs in which people can exercise their social, cultural, political and economic rights.

Development institutions in Botswana, like elsewhere in the world, are embedded in enduring unequal power relations played out along lines of gender, ethnicity and age in the context of global capitalist development. In this report, VDCs will be regarded as gendered institutions; and gender, as a structural principle, also intersects with and organises other social and institutional relations (such as age, religion, class and ethnicity). Institutional practices play an important role in maintaining, legitimising and masking gendered processes. The UNDP Report (2002:23) has shown that, around the world, women still earn only around 75% as much as men, and that domestic violence is common. This is in part due to the fact that women's voices have less impact than

men's in the decisions that shape their lives. The roles and symbolism associated with femininity, together with patriarchal authority and masculine privilege, continue to impose 'traditional' customs that are often in conflict with women's human rights (Molyneux and Razavi, 2003). Furthermore, social rights - particularly those related to social security - are often dependent on socio-economic status. The women and men mostly affected are the chronically unemployed; in Botswana, 26.3% of women and 21.3% of men are currently unemployed. These disparities reflect, among other things, institutionalised hiring preferences that favour men, and also the gender gap in wages.

From the above discussion, it is thus important to look at different settings in which specific gender encounters take place and form the basis upon which members of the VDCs participate and negotiate access to resources and services, and claim authority over other village-level institutions. Gender analysis focuses on how women and men redefine gender relations through their participation in VDCs and other institutional arenas. Women's and men's experiences of struggles with the impacts and privileges of development and democratic processes are bound to vary. Logically, the practices and concerns of VDC members in officially created spaces are also likely to differ.

1.2.3. Institutional Capacity

The term 'capability framework' highlights what people are able to do and to be with the resources at their command (UNDP, 2002). The framework is therefore sensitive to differences in needs, and reflects the underlying substantive conditions for developing people and institutional capabilities. Achieving a full set of capabilities constitutes the key criterion for judging the effectiveness of resource use. A harsh criticism of VDCs, therefore, is unfair, especially if the conditions and resources with which the VDCs work are not conducive. The state indeed is the principal agent of initiating and implementing development policies and programmes. It has to ensure adequate social/institutional arrangements, to which citizens have a duty to contribute by expanding their choices. VDCs as institutions for popular participation are weakly embedded in society, and are subject to presidential patronage to promote access to development.

1.3. VDCs and the Administration of Development

Village level institutions operate within legislative and regulatory frameworks. Botswana is a unitary state with a three-tier political-administrative hierarchy of authority for allocating and redistributing resources in order to achieve the country's national development goals. The top tier consists of central government institutions, whose functions are to formulate national development policies and programmes (Figure 2). Centralisation is born out of the desire to build a national identity and a common set of rules for the nation. In Botswana, respective government ministries (in particular the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning) primarily carry out resource planning and allocation functions. The Ministry of Local Government (MLG) is the parent ministry of local government, and is a statutory body with resource-allocating powers over personnel, supplies and the maintenance of several departments (Figure 2).

The second tier consists of district-level institutions. Botswana has 15 development administration districts whose function is to supervise and implement development programmes mandated by the central government. Districts constitute what are generally referred to as local government structures, and, according to Mfundisi (1998:167), they have mandatory functions provided by parliamentary statutes. At the district level, the most significant development institution is the

District Development Committee (DDC), established by a Presidential Directive in 1970. The DDC is chaired by the District Commissioner and is responsible for the coordination of development activities at district level. The DDC Terms of Reference include the coordination of activities of all local and central government agencies in the district with a view to promoting development; serving as a planning body for the district; advising agencies referred to it on all matters relating to development; and coordinating the planning, management and implementation of district development plans, annual plans, and any other plans in the district. Ideally, the DDC is also responsible for coordinating the development activities of NGOs in so far as they affect government and/or communities, with a view to harmonising them with government policy and programmes. The link between district development administration and NGOs is either very weak or intermittent. This situation gives the kgotla and the chiefs much flexibility and adaptability in terms of their ability to provide an alternative forum for debates on policy and programme issues.

The DDC has a sub-committee, the District Extension Team (DET) that consists of the Heads of Extension Departments at the district level. The DDC provides the DET with policy guidance and administrative support, while the DET is responsible for the interpretation of development policies and provides guidance to Village Extension Team (VET) and rural communities for the implementation of their programmes within such policies. With the emergence of sub-districts, sub-district extension teams have been established to strengthen the planning and monitoring system in those areas. The DET Terms of Reference include interpreting national policies in order to develop plans based on such policies; preparing district annual plans based on a priority list of identified village development programmes; ensuring the implementation of District Annual Plans; monitoring the implementation of VET activities; promoting communication amongst extension staff in order to facilitate the coordination and integration of programmes for efficient use of resources; organising seminars and workshops to facilitate the flow of information between extension teams and District Development Committees; and preparation of proposals for the improvement of village and district institutions. DET membership is composed of more senior officers at the district headquarters than those at the sub-district level.

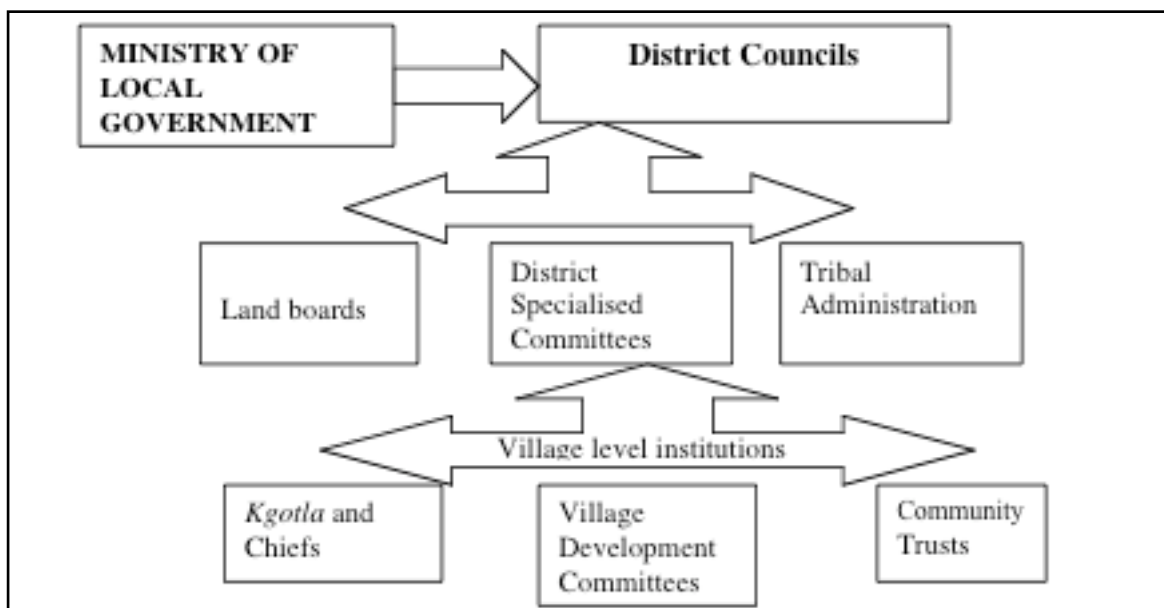


Figure 2. Three tier local government structure.

The third tier is a subset of the second, and constitutes the lowest level of the hierarchy. Included in this assortment, as already mentioned in the introduction, are traditional and non-traditional village-level institutions such as Village Development Committees (VDCs), chiefs, the kgotla and community trusts. VDCs work closely with, and coordinate the work of, the Village Extension Teams (VETs) and Village Health Committees (VHCs) as well as non-governmental organisations (Figure 2).

In Botswana, like elsewhere in the world, state institutions implement national programmes and policies. Central government institutions could create opportunities for the redistribution of resources from wealthier to poorer parts of the country. Achieving this is difficult because the delivery of centrally controlled national programmes may be costly to administer. Central government inefficiency problems include inadequate information processing, an organisational culture that presents a hostile service environment to customers, and poor communication and coordination both in the field and within administrative structures. Central government institutions are also less knowledgeable about local circumstances and needs, and they take a long time to implement programmes. Although state institutions are expected by local communities to deliver development programmes equitably to all citizens, distributional challenges in rural areas frustrate such goals. Ordinary people at village level are not likely on their own to be openly critical of the status quo, and more likely to collude with central government agents out of fear of reprisal. In addition, disgruntled conformism is likely to lead to passive participation, which does not build people's trust and confidence in government in the long run.

Central government inefficiency problems are also likely to be duplicated at district level. District-level institutions are fraught with implementation problems. These include the poor dissemination and processing of information, lethargic organisational cultures, and hostile customer service. Although there is a high flow of resources from central government to districts, access to these resources within and across districts is still problematic because of the limited administrative human resource capacity. There are complex problems of coverage, coordination and implementation of development activities.

There are broader issues facing both central- and district-level institutions. The modernisation of post-Independence Botswana's economy, for instance, has resulted in increased social mobility, migration and urbanisation. All these forms of social change have had adverse impacts on kinship and community structures, especially at village level. Furthermore, while the globalisation of Botswana's economy has increased opportunities for growth, it has also increased the risks of macro-economic shocks (unequal terms of trade and economic down turns). These globalised changes tend to hamper the ability of government to effectively deliver development programmes, and require government to use other strategies, such as community partnerships. Global shocks also have adverse effects on local communities, resulting in chronic unemployment and poverty, especially in remote and rural villages. Central- and district-level institutions cannot adequately deal with national and global shocks because of their limited human resources. Consequently, local institutions such as VDCs are increasingly becoming an important repository of peoples' expectations regarding development as a public good. These institutions do not substitute state agencies, however, but rather complement government interventions by forging institutional links between national- and district-level institutions, which are likely to be beneficial to local residents.

In Botswana, the delegation of operational responsibility (or 'out-sourcing' central government-funded development programmes to NGOs or private sector institutions) is unlikely to take place.

There is a lack of trust in government-NGO relations, partly due to the government's lukewarm outlook and patronising attitude toward the sector. Also, although NGOs can play an important role in the democratisation of development by making people aware of their economic and social rights, some donors can manipulate NGOs to pursue their own agendas, while others undermine local people's initiatives by dominating the local agenda. In addition, there is no systematic way for NGOs to speak on behalf of the whole community. Spokespersons for various local social movements are often self-appointed or have been sponsored by outside donor agencies that are non-representative. Unlike in the eastern part of the country, NGOs tend to have limited physical presence and service delivery coverage in predominantly rural districts such as Ngamiland and Kgalagadi.

From the above discussion, it is evident that district-level institutions remain the main service providers. Ideally, the goal of district-level institutions is delivery of services to vast geographical areas. In reality, limited human resource capacity makes it difficult to achieve some degree of equitable access to resources across social groups.

The effective implementation of social policies and programmes is critical to consolidating democracy. Botswana, as most countries in Africa, would prefer a process of democratisation that would address the perennial problems of economic deprivation and exploitation. To maintain peace and stability in Botswana, it is important to satisfy the basic needs of the people (food, education, health and shelter). To meet these needs requires an effective implementation of social policies and programmes that are community-driven and responsive to the needs, problems and aspirations of local people. Hypothetically, VDCs provide one avenue among others for addressing and debating implementation issues in a democratic fashion.

Under these circumstances, local-level mediating institutions are often useful. There are likely to be differences in access to resources and opportunities within and across districts in rural, remote and urban settings. Given Botswana's vast geographical area, VDC intervention is therefore carrying part of the burden of the direct delivery of services from the districts to the villages. These interlocutory institutions are expected to link ordinary people with district and national development programmes. To some extent, VDCs are community-based organisations (CBOs) in that ordinary people learn from them how to internalise democratic values by implementing projects aimed at addressing a range of community problems. Looked at in present and in isolation, VDC development impacts may appear negligible. But if examined historically, the emerging picture is more impressive. The presence of civic participation is a relative measure of the strength of democratic processes. Village-level institutions in particular help create inclusiveness and strengthen central-local government relations. It is at the lowest level that ordinary people take arrogant government officials to task. National policies are necessarily broad, while local interests are specific and detailed. VDCs provide space for an on-the-ground interpretation and implementation of a given policy or programme regardless of its origins and merits. A critical analysis of VDCs may therefore give insight into how they democratise development in ways that create a basis for the effective implementation of social policies.

1.4. Summary

Pre- and post-Independence village-level institutions co-exist, some in complimentary and others in adversarial relations. Prevailing institutional limitations notwithstanding, traditional and non-traditional village-level institutions have gained some degree of legitimacy. After Independence,

nation-building efforts called for the decentralisation of the delivery of public services in order to make these efficient and productive. The process of decentralisation in Botswana was adopted under a liberal democratic system of government and a public policy of decentralisation since Independence. Village Development Committees have been in existence since the country's independence and, together with the kgotla, have a pervasive influence in village daily life. They have become an integral part of the democratisation of development and for promoting and enforcing governance accountability.

A VDC is defined as a locality-based community institution that has been established by a presidential decree to legitimise participation by ordinary Batswana in the implementation of the country's decentralised development initiatives. VDCs in Botswana are more or less as old as the country's liberal democracy. The institution is non-statutory and consists of non-salaried members who receive a token sitting allowance. Although the institution is one of the oldest post-Independence institutions in the country, research on VDCs has been very limited. Unequal power relations are embedded in the institutional framework in the three-tier system of development administration. Although state institutions are expected by local communities to deliver development programmes equitably to all citizens, distributional challenges are a reality in rural areas. Broader issues facing both central- and district-level institutions include increased social mobility, migration and urbanisation. Global shocks also have adverse effects on local communities, resulting in chronic unemployment and poverty, especially in remote and rural villages.

Effective implementation of social policies and programmes is critical to consolidating democracy and maintaining peace and stability in Botswana. Satisfying the basic needs of Batswana, such as food, education, health and shelter, requires the effective implementation of social policies and programmes that are community-driven. Hypothetically, VDCs provide a viable means of addressing and debating, in a democratic fashion, these implementation issues. VDCs provide space for on-the-ground interpretation and implementation of a given policy.

Chapter 2 - Research Setting and Methodology

2.0. Research Area

The research site is in Ngamiland Sub-District, situated in the northwest corner of Botswana. Ngamiland is the third largest district in the country, with an area of 109,130 sq. km. The District's northern and western parts share a border with Namibia. According to the 2001 population census, the District has 124,712 people and an annual growth rate of 2.8%. This is slightly higher than the country growth rate of 2.4%. Maun is the District capital, and has 43,776 people and an annual growth rate of 5.0%. Gumare is headquarters of the Okavango Sub-District. Table 1 indicates the population growth in Ngamiland between 1964 and 2001.

Table 1. Population Growth in Ngamiland between 1964 and 2001.

	1964	1971		1981		1991		2001	
	Population	Population	Annual Growth Rate	Population	Annual Growth Rate	Population	Annual Growth Rate	Population	Annual Growth Rate
Country	514.378	574.094	1,6%	941.027	5,1%	1.326.796	3,5%	1.680.863	2,4%
Ngamiland	41.820	47.723	1,9%	68.063	3,6%	94.534	3,3%	124.712	2,8%
Maun	4.549	9.614	11,3%	14.925	4,5%	26.768	6,0%	43.776	5,0%

Source: Central Statistics Office 1964-2001.

Ngamiland lies on a bed of heavy Kalahari sand and includes the Okavango Delta flood plain (formed by the inflow of the Okavango River, which originates from the Angolan highlands, passing through Namibia and entering Botswana at Molembo). The Okavango Delta region is a Ramsar wetland of international importance that is characterised by a mosaic of meandering watercourses, floodplains, islands, and a variety of wildlife and vegetation species. The Delta is also a major source of livelihoods for local communities, and is also an important attraction for tourism, which is the second-most important economic activity in Botswana after diamonds (Thakadu, 1997; Mbaiwa, 2005).

As a result of the rapidly increasing population, there is increasing pressure on land and natural resources. During the last 50 years, the relative dominance of different livelihood activities has changed notably. Furthermore, economic activities vary in response to variations in natural conditions, access to resources, labour, capital, and other factors (IUCN, 1992:2-10). Natural factors like droughts, changing flood levels, and flooding patterns and diseases have always had impacts on the traditional land use system in Ngamiland. People in Ngamiland have adopted a diversified, multi-activity, low-input land use system as an appropriate livelihood strategy to cope with natural and human-induced risks.

The vastness of the District and its geography make communication and travelling difficult. The ethnic groups living in Ngamiland are BaTswana, BaYei, BaHerero and BaMbukushu; minority

groups include BaKgalagadi, BaSubia, BaXhereku and BaSarwa. The settlement and land use patterns in Ngamiland reflect how people's livelihoods depend on the availability of water. Most villages in Ngamiland are located along the margins of the Okavango Delta, where there is water for human and stock consumption. The development of permanent physical infrastructure and the availability of social services (like water supply, health and education facilities, and roads) and the eradication of tsetse fly have enabled people to develop more permanent settlements around the Okavango Delta (Murray-Hudson, Parry, 1997:31). The percentage of people formally employed in the agricultural sector has drastically decreased in the last ten years, while the government sector has become the major employer in the District (29% of the labour force in 2001).

In the last 30 years, government policies and land use planning and zoning decisions made by district and tribal authorities have influenced the spatial coverage of different land use activities, and have had direct implications on the land use options and mobility of traditional farmers in Ngamiland. Large parts of the district are no longer (or only under certain conditions) available for livestock grazing. Due to its rich wildlife potential, almost the entire Okavango Delta (29% of the tribal land or 225,505 km²) was declared a Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in 1992. This means that the primary form of land use is consumptive (hunting) and non-consumptive (photographic) wildlife utilisation (Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act, 1992) Erection of buffalo fence followed by the declaration of the Delta as a cattle-free zone deprived local farmers of their traditional right to utilise the Delta as a fall-back grazing area in years of drought (van der Heiden, 1991). Since 1996 stock regulations have been effectively enforced. Communities like Jedibe, Ditshipi, Daonara, Sankuyo, Khwai and Mababe, all located inside the buffalo fence, are no longer allowed to keep cattle. Nowadays people in these delta communities live from formal employment in the safari industry, from Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) revenues, from the collection and sale of veld products like thatching grass, and from the production of crafts.

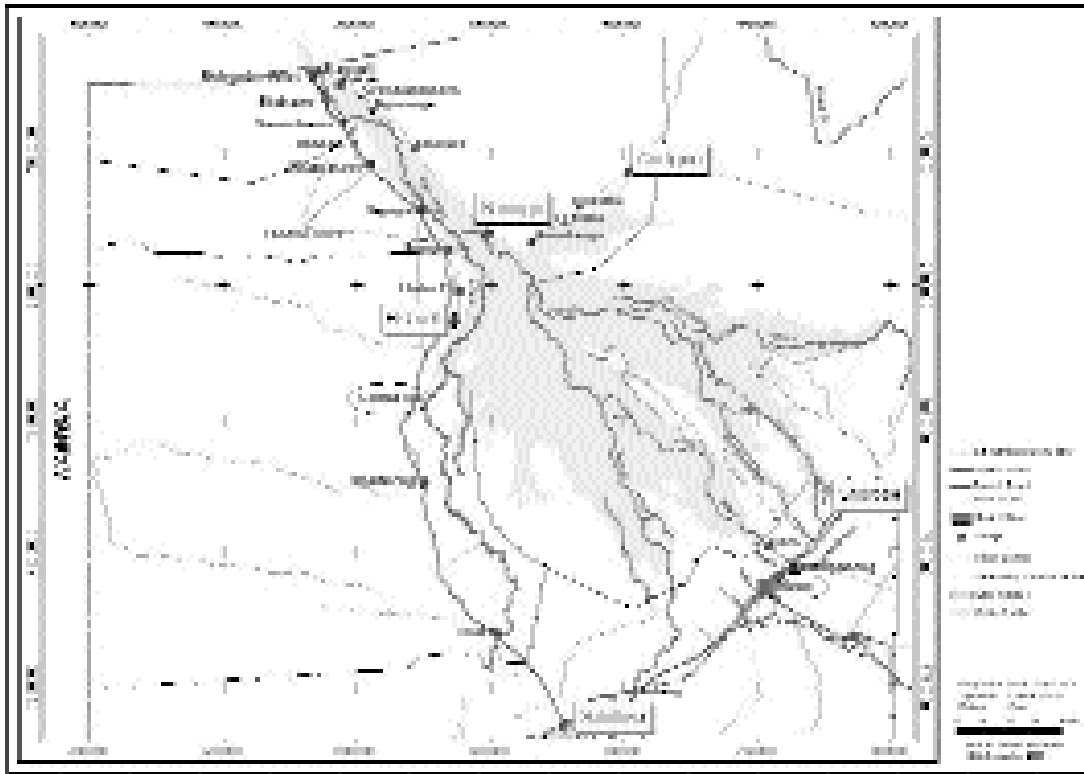
2.1. Research Sites

The study covers eleven VDCs. VDCs from the villages of Shorobe, Etsha 6, Seronga, Gudigwa, Sehithwa and Gumare were selected, as were five out of fifteen randomly selected VDCs in Maun. The justification for selecting the villages of Shorobe, Etsha 6, Seronga and Gudigwa was that these four villages were part of the Every River Has Its People (ERHIP) research project (2003), which provides baseline data for this study. Sehithwa was not part of the ERHIP research project, but has been included for its dependence on livestock farming and also because residents of Sehithwa had to adapt to the desiccation of the Nhabe River and Lake Ngami. VDCs in Maun and Gumare were selected because both settings are urban villages, whereas Maun is the District headquarters of the Ngami Sub-District while Gumare is the headquarters of the Okavango Sub-District. These VDCs are in primary settlements compared to VDCs in rural and remote areas. (Table 2 and Map 1).

Table 2 Selected VDCs.

Ngamiland District		
Sub-District	Ngami	Okavango
Village Development Committees	Sehitwa Shorobe	Gudigwa Seronga Etsha 6
	Maun (urban village)	
	Boseja Boyei Thito	Kubung Matlapana
		South VDC

Map 1. The Okavango Delta and research sites.



Etsha 6 is one of the former 13 settlements of Angolan refugees who settled in this area in 1969/70. It is situated at the western fringe of the Okavango Delta. In 2001, the settlement had a population of 2,629 (1,160 males and 1,469 females) and 526 households. The main livelihood activities in this village are basket making, dryland farming and beer brewing. A survey by the Every River Has its People Project (2002) suggests a high level of illiteracy (61.4% of sampled heads of households had no formal education, 18.2% had less than primary leaving certificate, 6.8% had primary leaving certificate, and 11.4% had junior secondary certificates).

Seronga is situated in the western part of the Okavango Delta, and had according to the 2001 census a population of 1,641 (683 males and 958 females) and 128 households. The main sources of livelihood for the households in this village are tourism, dryland farming, fishing, drought relief

and public works, and sales of food, traditional beer, and river and veld products. Seronga is predominantly a BaYei village, but other ethnic groups such as BaMbukushu and BaSarwa are also found in the area. Like Shorobe, sources of livelihood in Seronga include formal employment, self-employment and community based natural resource management (the Okavango Polers Trust (OPT) and Okavango Community Trust (OCT)). A survey by the Every River Has its People Project (2002) suggests 50% of sampled heads of households had no formal education, 19.2% had less than primary leaving certificate, 19.2% had primary leaving certificate, and 11.5% had junior secondary certificates.

Gudigwa is a collection of eight resettled Basarwa clans of the Bukakhwe group from different areas. The main clans include Xhondoro, Xharango, Gwakeqwe, Xhwatau, Ghicudza, Xhwakatsu, Hqwengu and Thobokhuru. A significant percentage of Gudigwa came into existence after the collation of eight clans in 1987 through the government-driven Remote Area Dwellers Programme (RADP). The main objective of the RADP was to collect ethnic groups from scattered settlements into central locations so that basic services and facilities could be provided. Although 95% of the population of Gudigwa are Basarwa, other groups such as Basubia and Bayei have since joined them. According to the 2001 Housing and Population Census (COS, 2002), Gudigwa has a population of 732 (385 males and 347 females). The village is about 65 km northeast of Seronga on the eastern side of the Okavango River panhandle. It is the last of a chain of villages that stretch from Mohembo in the southwest. The main economic activities in Gudigwa are pastoral farming and limited dryland farming. The village of Gudigwa is a member of the Okavango Community Trust (OCT) and Bakhakwe Cultural Conservation Trust (BCCT), whose initiatives include deriving economic benefits from cultural tourism (Mbaiwa and Ratsundu, 2003).

Sehitwa village lies 100 km from Maun and is located at the junction of the Maun, Ghanzi and Shakawe roads. The village has a population of 1,478 (631 male and 847 females). Sehitwa residents mainly raise livestock. The main ethnic groups are Baherero and Batawana. Trade and commerce include the sale of traditional beer, retail shops, bottle stores, a bakery, restaurant and Chibuku depot. Tribal administration infrastructure includes a headman, customary court, tribal police, court office, kgotla, kraal, public toilets, a public library and a social work office. Central government agencies include a clinic with maternity ward, a primary and Community Junior Secondary School (CJSS), Botswana police station, veterinary assistant offices, guest houses and an HIV/AIDS counselling centre run by the Lutheran Church. Informal groups and non-governmental organisations in the village are the Banderu Cultural Organisation, branches of Young Women Christian Council (YWCA) and Botswana Council of Women (BCW), Boy Scouts, and a plethora of churches (conventional and African independent). Modes of transport from Sehitwa to Maun and elsewhere in the country include the use of private cars, access to mini- and long-distance buses, and the use of donkey carts and bicycles within the village. Telecommunications include the use of cell phones, about 103 private lines and three public booths. Formal sources of information for the literate in Sehitwa include access to newspapers, magazines, the radio and television (few households).

Shorobe is situated 30 km to the northeast of Maun. The estimated population of Shorobe is 955 (409 males and 546 females). The main sources of livelihood in this village are formal employment, self-employment (sale of grass, reeds, fishing, firewood, beer, vegetables and basket-making), livestock and molapo arable farming, and community based natural resource management initiatives. Languages spoken are mostly Setswana and Seyei. Shorobe used to be a river village. There is a clinic without a maternity ward, primary school, an adult education facility, and a social

worker. Tribal administration includes the kgotla and a senior chief. Trade and commerce include shops and a bottle store. There are no NGOs in Shorobe. People going to Maun use mini-buses, and donkey carts and bicycles within the village. A survey by the Every River Has its People Project suggests a high level of illiteracy (77.4% of sampled heads of households had no formal education, 16.1% had less than primary leaving certificate, 3.2% had primary leaving certificates and 3.2% had junior secondary certificates).

Gumare is the headquarters of the Okavango Sub-District. The village has 6,067 people, of these 2,646 are male and 3,421 are female. Gumare used to be a river village. A survey by the Every River Has its People Project suggests considerable illiteracy (46.2% of sampled head of households had no formal education, 23.1% had less than primary leaving certificate, 18.5% had primary leaving certificates and 15% had junior secondary certificates). Gumare is home to BaYei, BaMbukushu and BaTawana. Formal and self-employment are the main sources of livelihood. Sources of water include stand pipes, private connections and boreholes. Although Gumare is a sub-district capital, there are no banking facilities except for cash loan micro-lenders, and residents go to Maun for financial transactions. Central- and district-level institutions include a post office, primary hospital, water, power, Botswana police, agriculture, telecommunication departments and sub-land board. The tribal administration facilities are well developed in Gumare and include a tribal chief, a court office and tribal police. There are retail, wholesale and distribution outlets in Gumare; these include shops, bottles stores, butchery, restaurants, funeral undertakers and a cash loan agency. Gumare is the home of the Kamanakao Cultural Association and various organisations, labour unions and civil society organisations such as the Botswana Red Cross, as well as numerous civic associations such as sports clubs, youth and women's groups.

Maun is the capital of the North West District. Maun has 43,776 residents, of these 20,299 are male and 23,477 are female. Maun is the hub of Botswana's tourist industry. Tourism-related commercial activities include guest houses, hotels, lodges, campsites, chalets, restaurants, fast-food and craft outlets, retail, distribution and wholesale businesses, recreational facilities such as the Maun sports complex and swimming pools, airport, cash-loan facilities and four commercial banks. There is a primary hospital, numerous clinics and a private hospital. As the North West District headquarters, all central government departments are represented.

2.2. Data Collection Methods

2.2.1. Focus Group Seminars

An interview schedule was constructed for data collection which was done through one-day focus group seminars. These were conducted in July and August 2004. A pre-test of the focus group schedule was conducted in two villages, Tubu, about 13 km south of Gumare, and Chanoga, 15 km west of Maun. The seminars were held with the VDC executive group (the secretary, chairperson and treasurer) and additional members (2-3). Where possible, the oldest-serving members of the VDC were included. In Maun, five focus group seminars were conducted with the following randomly selected ward VDCs - Boyei, Thito, Kubung, Boseja and Matlapana. These constituted one third of the 15 VDCs in Maun. Gumare has two VDCs, and one focus group seminar was conducted with the Gumare South VDC. Single focus group seminars were conducted in each village of Shorobe, Sehitwa, Seronga and Gudigwa. In total, eleven focus groups were completed. The average focus group size was six persons, with executive members constituting more than half of these.

The seminar-like one-day interactive focus group method was suitable for identifying and exploring the historical beginnings and pathways of each group, for revealing developmental milestones, practices and processes, and for legitimising development projects and social recognition. Focus group discussions (Morgan, 1988; Vaughn and Schumm, 1996) were also appropriate for observing emerging localising practices and traditions of VDC organisation. The focus groups were conducted in Setswana, and provided both deep and nuanced descriptions of VDC practices. Where the respondent was not conversant in Setswana, a local translator was used. In Gudigwa, both individual and focus group discussions were conducted in Sesarwa and Setswana.

Members of focus groups knew each other fairly well and were comfortable debating and expressing themselves, at times presenting contending views regarding various practices, interventions and understandings of problems in their community. Meeting places varied, from kgotla offices or leobo to air-conditioned seminar rooms at the Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre (HOORC) in Maun. Group discussions made it easy for participants to check each other's information and to discuss sensitive issues such as the mismanagement of finances, institutional and group relations, and other extra-group activities. Focus group discussions allowed knowledge disclosure that individuals would have been less likely to openly discuss with an outsider.

The seminar had a facilitator and two scribes. The facilitator concentrated on asking closed- and open-ended questions from the interview schedule in order to structure the discussion. The scribes took notes that were both typed and preserved as electronic documents for analysis. The seminar gathered information about the criteria and incentives for participation in VDCs; community development and access to resources; VDCs and participation in public issues; implementation of policies and programmes; VDCs and social change over time; participatory politics; leadership and democratic governance; inter- and intra-institutional relationships at village, district and national levels; VDCs' experiences of trusts and collective action; and challenges and prospects for VDCs in Botswana generally and in Ngamiland in particular.

The semi-structured questions were asked in a conversation-like fashion, in which a series of inter-related probing questions were linked. During the discussions, respondents provided both nominal and ordinal information that could be sorted, ordered, counted, linked and related to other sources of information. It was thus possible to simultaneously collect qualitative information (such as groups' meeting places, inter-group events and invitations) and quantifiable qualitative variables (for example the frequency of meetings).

2.2.2. Structured Individual Interviews

Structured interviews with individual members of the VDCs were also conducted prior to the one-day focus group seminar. The questionnaire had both closed- and open-ended questions. A full VDC has ten members (five executive and five additional). Forty-five (81%) of a total of 55 VDC members were interviewed to provide baseline information on VDC membership and institutional practices. The individual interview questionnaire was also pre-tested in Tubu, 10 km south of Gumare, and Chanoga, 15 km east from Maun. Due to low levels of literacy, individual questionnaires were administered face-to-face in Setswana, the national language. In other villages such as Sehitwa, Seronga and Etsha 6, the majority of respondents are bilingual (that is can fluently speak both Setswana and Seherero, Seyei and Sembukushu, respectively). Individual interviews collected data on VDC profiles, membership (demographic, household sizes, access to facilities and services,

socio-economic status), generalised community participation of VDC members, and VDC skills and knowledge capacity.

2.2.3. Semi-Structured Interviews and Participant Observation

The semi-structured questions were asked in a conversation-like fashion with relevant stakeholders in the respective villages, such as ex-VDC members or “graduates,” councillors, chiefs, teachers, community health nurses and social workers, village extension staff, remote area dwellers, and community development officers. Data was also collected from primary sources including VDC minutes; from unobtrusive participation in kgotla meetings and workshops; from reading working documents and workshop or seminar reports on VDCs; and from secondary sources such as central- and district-level government departments and non-governmental organisations. Secondary sources included published books, articles, census data, and policy and programme documents. Other data was gathered through direct participation in VDC meetings, and public ceremonial events in which VDCs actively participated (particularly in Maun). These events included World AIDS Day, President’s Day, Independence, clean-up campaigns and Vision 2016 Week.

2.3. Data Analysis

2.3.1. Cultural Analysis

The VDC is the unit of analysis in focus groups. Quantifiable qualitative data from focus groups was coded, keyed and analysed through SPSS. Since qualitative variables are embedded in social and institutional relations and processes, a cultural analysis (Wuthnow et al, 1993) of focus groups, participant observations and informal interviews was done. Cultural analysis involves looking at specific ways in which social actors in VDCs appropriate and (re)use readily available cultural resources (including institutional rules) to reinvent and embed their own traditions in the context of dominant practices in the larger society. Re-invention of institutional practices and relations is likely to differ from village to village, although sharing some similarities that cut across differences. Redeployment of institutional and social practices has both intended and unintended outcomes for VDCs. Cultural analysis helps reconnect disconnected processes and events into a coherent narrative of past and present developments. Data from informal interviews provide a depth of interpretation that consists of understanding the comprehensiveness of a particular item within a totality, as well as factors underlying the general whole.

2.3.2. Comparative Analysis

Combining survey and focus group data makes it possible to do comparative analysis of VDCs within and across social settings in the district - that is, what they do, with whom and how, what their traditions are, and milestones and challenges. This provides a historical perspective on various processes of growth and change over time. From a social policy point of view, the ways in which institutions are formed and perform has important implications for community participation in public life.

2.3.3. Gender Analysis

Gender analysis attempts to provide an empirical and theoretical understanding of how different groups of women and men in VDCs reconstitute gender relations in implementing development projects in given cultural contexts.

Chapter 3 - VDC Structure, Participation and Villagisation

Currently, Ngamiland has 55 functioning VDCs in gazetted villages. Ngami Sub-District has 30, whereas Okavango Sub-District has 25. Maun has 15 VDCs and Gumare has two. The VDC Handbook stipulates that where a minimum of five or more VDCs exists, an umbrella committee must be established. Since Maun has 15 VDCs, an umbrella VDC has been set up, consisting of 15 members who are Chairpersons in their respective VDCs. The umbrella committee meets on a quarterly basis. Officially, there are 12 scheduled VDC meetings per year, which attract a sitting allowance (Botswana Government, 2001). This nominal allowance is paid on condition that the VDC has submitted minutes of the meeting in question. Emergency or special meetings are not remunerated. An umbrella VDC has only two paid special meetings in a year. The main function of the umbrella VDC is to undertake development projects that would benefit the entire village (not just one ward), such as commissioning a community park or the construction of a sports complex.

A VDC has 10 members who are elected at the kgotla. There are five executive members and five additional members. In addition, there are a number of ex-officio members (people who, by virtue of their social positions, are automatically members of the VDCs). These are drawn from a pool that includes, but is not limited to, the village Headman, Councillors, local business persons, social workers and extension workers. Only the 10 elected members have the power to vote. The VDC Executive Committee consists of the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Vice Secretary and the Treasurer. Ex-officio members do not have any executive powers. In theory ex-officio members are proxy watch-dogs whose function is to safeguard or propagate the government's development agenda. In practice, as we shall indicate later in this section, VDCs run their daily activities independently, and have much leeway in setting their development agenda. They make use of the officially sanctioned space to be pro-active, and more often than not, use the opportunity to redefine the official script in response to community contingencies.

Eligible members should be able to read and write at least one official language (either English or Setswana), have completed an education to at least Standard 7 or its equivalent, be 18 years of age or above, be the residents of the village or ward, and be nominated and seconded by people who qualify to vote (Botswana Government, 2001). Prior to 2001, completion of Standard 7 or its equivalent was not insisted upon, but new regulations required that eligible members must have Standard 7 qualification as a minimum. The new regulations also require VDCs to be elected through secret ballot at the kgotla. Prior to the development of this new requirement, the committee was popularly elected through an open ballot at a kgotla. However, the secret ballot practice has not been widely embraced. Chapter 5 will discuss the existence of both systems and their advantages and disadvantages in detail. Suffice it to point out that a social worker usually presides over both methods of electing VDC representatives. The tenure of office of VDC members was, and still is, two years. Individuals have the option to be re-elected as many times as feasible.

Official functions of the VDCs include, but are not limited to, identifying, discussing, formulating and prioritising community development requests, and finding solutions to identified problems. They solicit external assistance, either directly or indirectly through partnerships with the

government, non-governmental and private organisations, and from the community. They also provide fora for contact between village leaders, politicians, district authorities, and a range of social interest groups for purposes of either obtaining information or material support. The VDCs use the kgotla as a forum for presenting, discussing, approving and implementing all village development projects.

Rural, remote and urban villages in Botswana constitute an important component of development administration infrastructure. Urban or major villages such as Maun and Gumare are important commercial, cultural and social centres. In present day Botswana, the National Settlement Policy (1998) defines a village as a traditional settlement that is established on tribal land and has a minimum population of 500 people. For a village to be officially established or gazetted there should be consensus among the four local institutions, namely the Land board, Tribal Administration, Council and District Administrations. There are settlements that do not meet the 500 people criteria, but because of their special features - for instance scattered Basarwa localities in the Okavango Delta - a special consideration is made to accord them village status although their population threshold is lower. Rural settlements with populations between 250 and 499 are often referred to as “remote area settlements”. However, in Ngamiland, where about 50% of the population live in settlements of less than 500 people, some exceptions to the rule are made for settlements such as the CBNRM villages in Sankoyo, Mababe and Kwai (where the population is about 370 people).

Matlapana, Seronga, Etsha 6 and Shorobe are Type II tertiary settlements (1,000–5,999 people), and they enjoy a mid-level presence of district administration institutions. Shorobe is classified as a Type III tertiary or rural village (500-999 people), and Gudigwa is classified as a remote area or Type IV tertiary settlement (theoretically with a population of less than 500 residents, but the current population is over 700) (Table 3). Maun is a primary settlement, Sehitwa and Gumare are secondary centres, meaning that the villages have more government departments established there, and thus have an increased level of resource and service provision by government. The 1991 Census defines an urban village as a settlement with a population of 5,000 or more persons, with at least 75% of the labour force in non-agricultural occupations, and the urban areas as non-agricultural commercial centres regardless of the population size. According to the census definition, Maun and Gumare are urban villages. Table 3 below indicates settlement types in the areas of study.

Table 3. Settlement hierarchy by population size.

Settlement Hierarchy	Population Range	Research Settlement Level
Primary centre - urban village	19,999 - 100,000	Maun
Secondary centre - urban village	10,00 - 19,999	Gumare, Sehitwa
Tertiary centre I	5,000 - 9,999	
Tertiary centre II	1,000 - 5,999	Matlapana, Seronga, Etsha 6
Tertiary centre III - rural village	500 - 999	Shorobe, Gudigwa
Tertiary centre IV - remote village	250 - 499	

Other VDCs may represent associated settlements. These settlements do not have the population threshold required for them to be officially recognised as gazetted villages. Where it is not possible to have direct representation in primary or secondary settlements, residents of rural localities often set up what is known as an ‘Action VDC’ or ‘unofficial VDC’ (van Hoof et al, 1991). “Action VDCs” perform the same functions as VDCs in gazetted villages, but under the direct supervision of the “parent” VDC in the primary or secondary settlement. Sometimes Action VDCs are instrumental in the “villagisation” of rural settlements. In other words, they actively encourage permanent migration and settlement in *meraka* (cattle posts) or *masimo* (farm-lands) and transform these from ungazetted to gazetted villages. For instance, they take measures to have the community elect and confirm a headman, and provide district authorities with demographic information for purposes of upgrading the locality status to a gazetted village. Once the population requirement is met and tribal administrative structures are in place, a locality can be ultimately recognised as a gazetted village and have a formal VDC.

As already stated above, in Ngamiland 50% of the population live in settlements of less than 500 people. These communities have not been classified as remote area dwellers. This means that they cannot receive social services such as health and education directly (see Table 3), and have to rely on the ability of secondary settlements to advocate on their behalf. In terms of access to resources, some officially gazetted villages are likely to have physically expansive catchment areas consisting of scattered satellite settlements. Once the population increases in remote or rural localities, people opt to settle permanently in places that were originally meant for temporary domicile. As people settle permanently, and as their numbers steadily increase, they begin to demand direct access to resources such as water and to other human development services such as health care and education. In order to speed up the process and lobby tribal administration in primary centres, some residents of small localities begin to organise “action VDCs” and propose to have a chief or headman appointed. With the right numbers, a VDC, kgotla and a chief are officially established after due process, and the other benefits that go with those are expected to follow.

The central instrument for the delivery of development programmes has been the state. Although democratic institutions and procedures generally allow citizen participation in pressing for change, the degree to which development has been democratised and consolidated is variable. VDCs, as composed of community activists and citizens, embody aspects of this variability. The dynamic realities on the ground are complex.

“Villagisation”, for lack of a better term, constitutes what can be considered as an element of “bringing development to the people” by turning upside-down some of the linear hierarchical flow of decision-making with regard to the allocation of resources. In this scenario, communities are not just sub-sets of the state, passively assimilating state directives. These micro-practices represent invisible, self-empowering, participatory democratic processes in the context of statutory dominance by centralised, visible, normative and exclusive institutions (government, NGOs and the private sector), and these events are less likely to become national headline news.

3.1. Internal Participatory Dynamics in VDCs

An analysis of VDC membership profiles from individual interviews and focus groups suggests that members are fairly typical Batswana. Over half of them are livestock and arable farmers. Few are in formal employment work in bricklaying, teaching, security, hospitality, construction, cleaning services, drought relief or small scale enterprises.

Taking housing as a proxy measure for socio-economic status, and also from structured individual interviews, VDC members again reflect ordinary citizens. For instance, only 22.2% lived in a detached, modern brick and metal roof house, compared to 46.7% who lived in traditional houses made of mud, grass or reed (letlhaka), with 31.1% who lived in compounds of mixed housing structures (traditional and brick houses). The predominantly traditional type of housing occupied by VDC members underlines the more rural nature of Ngamiland as compared to other districts in the country. According to the 2001 Census, in Ngamiland East approximately 35% of housing units were traditional and 20% were modern (or detached), compared to 75% of traditional and 38% of detached houses in Ngamiland West. The Ngamiland situation can be compared, for example with Kgatleng District, which has approximately 13% traditional and 54% detached houses, and the South East, which has 5.20% traditional and 62.3% detached houses (CSO, 2002). The point here is that intra- and inter-district variations reflect differences in access to resources and opportunities such as employment and education. Further, VDC members in rural and remote settings have to get by with fewer resources at household level compared to their counterparts in major villages such Maun and Gumare.

With regard to the social status of VDC members, individual surveys suggest that 26.7% were never married, 46.7% were married, and 26.7% cohabitated or were divorced or separated. Although overall disaggregated data suggest that married persons constitute the majority of VDC members, those who were never married yet were cohabitating constitute the majority. From focus group discussions in Seronga, Gudigwa, Gumare and Kubung, married persons were in the majority up to the 1990s, thereafter unmarried persons began to make inroads into the institution. Young people are rarely members. However, Sehitwa and Matlapana VDCs are somewhat different in that it is the unmarried who seem to have a long history of active participation. Asked why this was the case, the members indicated that the nature of VDC work required women to work outside the home and sometimes at night, a situation that was unacceptable to most husbands. Sehitwa has maintained a long history of unmarried women who are community activists in their own right. Some of these members have been in office more than twice. Overall, VDCs are socially inclusive when it comes to marital status.

A gender analysis of VDC membership in the study areas suggests that there are slightly more women (52.2%) than men (47.7%). However, there is in-group variation - when data are disaggregated men predominate in some VDCs while women constitute the majority in others. Likewise, some VDCs are gender balanced, that is they have an equal number of men and women. In villages such as Seronga and Gumare, for instance, married men initiated VDCs in the spirit of self-help, and it is not until recently that women and youth made inroads there. The current Gumare South VDC consists of 60% males and 40% females, while Seronga has now struck a 50-50 gender balance. With other VDCs the situation is reversed. In other words, women, through voluntary labour, started VDCs, and the gender composition has not changed significantly (Thito and Kubung VDCs for instance). Men and youth are therefore latecomers in the game. Focus group discussions in Sehitwa suggest that unmarried women were and still are active VDC members. Currently the VDC has an equal number of women (single) and men (4 married). Kubung VDC is composed of 10% males and 90% females, whereas Matlapana VDC is composed of 55% males and 45% females. In other VDCs, youth and women still remain a minority in these groups. In Gudigwa, middle-aged and elderly males started the VDC in the 1980s. The Committee at the time of the interview had 8 males and 2 females. Table 4 below gives a summary of the gender profile of VDC membership in the research sites.

Table 4. Gender profile of VDCs in research villages.

Name of VDC	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female
Maun					
Boyei	5	6	10	50	60
Thito	3	6	9	33	70
Boseja	4	6	10	40	60
Kubung	1	9	10	10	90
Matlapana	5	4	9	55	45
Other VDCs					
Gumare	6	4	10	60	40
Gudigwa	8	2	10	80	20
Sehitwa	5	5	10	50	50
Shorobe	5	5	10	50	50
Etsha 6	5	5	10	50	50
Seronga	5	5	10	50	50
Total	52	57	109	50	50

Although women form the majority in most VDCs, males tend to be chairpersons, while women control the VDC finances as treasurers and manage the flow of information as secretaries. While in other institutions this may not necessarily be true, in VDCs these are politically key positions that are also part of the Executive, the implementing branch of the organisations. In addition, these positions require a certain level of literacy and numeric skills that are in short supply, especially in Ngamiland (Table 5). These skills are an important component of human capital which, as will be indicated shortly, are redeployed for the benefit of the group in VDCs.

Table 5. Gender profile of VDC Executive.

VDC Executive	Male	Female	% Male	% Female
Chairperson	8	3	73	27
Vice Chairperson	8	3	73	27
Secretary	2	9	18	82
Vice Secretary	4	7	36	64
Treasurer	4	7	36	64

Internal gender dynamics in VDCs are important to analyse because they reflect institutional change in gender relations. First, it is important to understand how men and women in VDCs use different strategies to “gain entry” and negotiate access to formal institutions. Second, resource access is often based on the cultural expectations and roles women and men play in the everyday social life of the community. Hence, while in VDCs participation appears to favour women, decision-making is reflected in cultural terms as a public domain of men. This implies that women have to work harder and continue to negotiate cultural legitimacy as independent actors in their own right. VDCs provide that opportunity, and some trade-offs are expected to be made.

According to Moore (1994:98) men do not act “outside culture” while women act “within culture”. Men are just as traditional as women, also men maintain or change “culture” to the same extent that

women do. Therefore women in VDCs locate themselves in relation to femininity just as men relate to masculinity. It is important to understand that the ways in which men and women participate in these categories is part of constructing the ways in which they also form themselves as persons and agents. Although most women have fewer arenas to choose from than men, some women may for instance position themselves in a dominant discourse that has benefits. However, as Molyneux and Razavi (2003) point out, the state has to create material and institutional prerequisites that will cultivate the ability of women to choose a line of action, and to ensure that patriarchal authority and privilege are not used to legitimise women's subjugation or the violation of their human rights.

VDCs, especially those in rural and remote areas, have illiterate to semi-literate members. Most VDC members in Gudigwa have attained non-formal education (57%) while the rest (43%) never attended school. Overall, almost half of VDC members either have no education or have attained lower primary education (Standard 4). Obviously the new eligibility criterion, which requires that applicants should have attempted Standard 7, will disadvantage many. Interestingly, this criterion was successfully challenged in court in November 2003 by VDCs in Old Naledi, Gaborone. The Gaborone City Council wanted to impose it, but the court ruled that the Council had no authority to enforce the criterion, which was not even legally binding. VDCs argued that they were doing their work effectively and the level of educational attainment was thus irrelevant. Informal interviews with the Community Development Officer in Gumare pointed out that, in order to accommodate for low levels of literacy in the District, the officers insist that only the treasurer and the chairperson must have attained Standard 7. This is a discretionary form of inclusion in the face of official exclusionary tendencies. There is bound to be continued tension between peoples' rights to participate in village level activities vis-à-vis government's demand for basic competencies in order to prop up real or imagined efficiency in the implementation of community development projects.

Notwithstanding the above, educational attainment within VDCs can be seen as human capital that is not totally locked into individuals' heads. Rather, in the context of VDCs, it is a shared communal resource. At VDC institutional level, education is a key asset that contributes to the overall well-being of the community. At individual level, education improves the quality of labour and income-earning power. Overall low levels of human capital in VDCs tend to exacerbate differential access to services and resources compared to other local institutions (especially in relation to community trusts). This deficit makes it even more important for VDCs to share whatever human capital they have and also to use the VDC to generate other forms of capital, through participation for instance in other village-level community groups, in order to generate social capital.

Although at individual level VDC members often have low formal educational attainment, the institution creates opportunities for members to acquire knowledge through informal means. For instance, VDCs gain access to information through other avenues such as attending workshops, seminars and conferences. In individual interviews, members were asked to indicate whether or not they had travelled outside their villages on VDC duties in the past twelve months, such as for attending a conference, workshop, seminar, network meetings, ceremonial events or in-service training. About 47% said that they had and 52 % indicated that they had not. VDC chairpersons and secretaries are most likely to be invited out on official duty. Compared to VDCs outside Maun and Gumare, VDC members in rural and remote areas such as Gudigwa are less likely to either have conferences or workshops organised and run in their own village or to have opportunities to be invited to attend such gatherings outside their village. Therefore, although some VDC members may not have travelled outside Maun and Gumare, they nonetheless are able to attend such

educational activities in their villages or wards. However, of those who said they had travelled on official duty, about 84.2% travelled between 1-3 times and the rest between 4-6 times. VDC members also have the opportunity to share information, ideas and experience. Again, knowing who is doing what, where and for what purpose is important, especially in Ngamiland where, compared to other districts, physical and telecommunication infrastructure pose serious challenges of isolation and exclusion from public debates on development.

Compared to other districts, Ngamiland is considered the most ethnically diverse. Statistics are not available to verify this because neither Botswana census data nor the national registration (Omang) exercise require people to state their ethnicity. This diversity is also reflected in the composition of VDC membership. Since their inception in the 1970s, VDC membership reflects diverse ethnic participation. An assessment of the overall ethnic profile of VDC membership from individual interviews indicates that the majority of VDC members in the surveyed localities are Wayei (29%) and Batawana (27%) followed by the Hambukushu (18%) and Basarwa (16%), with other ethnic groups constituting 11%. In Gudigwa the VDC was established in the early 1980s. The majority of members are Basarwa (86%) because the village itself is predominantly a Basarwa settlement. In Seronga, 67% of VDC members are Wayei and 33% are Hambukushu. The Gumare VDC seems to have an equal number of Batawana and Basarwa (14%), while Wayei still dominate (43%) and other ethnic groups account for 30% of VDC members. Kubung VDC in Maun is 100% Batawana, while in Matlapana, Batawana constitute only 20% and Wayei dominate (60%), with other ethnic groups forming 20%. Etsha 6 is dominated by the Hambukushu (86%) and Wayei (17%) (Table 6).

From the point of view of ethnic diversity, VDCs foster a positive cultural identity. The practicality of “getting the job done” tends to override an ethnocentrism that is peppered by discriminatory practices against a particular group on the basis of their identity. This does not mean that an individual member of a VDC does not hold a particular ethnic bias against other groups across surveyed villages – such may indeed occur. From focus group interviews in all the localities, there was no evidence to suggest that a VDC failed to deliver a public good due to either internal or external strife fuelled by ethnic differences. In addition, there was no evidence to suggest that specific social groups in the community were singled out and denied access to resources solely on the basis of their ethnicity. VDC members in all the localities affirmed that they encourage ethnic minority groups to take over VDC leadership. Some VDC members are active in cultural organisations such as the Kamanakao Association in Gumare, Maun and Seronga, or other organisations (e.g. Bukhakwe Cultural Association in Gudigwa), but they insist that a VDC is not a forum for expressing parochial ethnic views, whether they are based on religious preferences, cultural or ethnic identity, or political affiliation. This assertion should not be taken to mean that VDCs are necessarily politically naïve. On the contrary, during focus groups, some members admitted being card-holders of certain political parties, but they insisted that VDCs were not a forum for partisanship, be it politics or anything else. However, the cultural assertion of Wayei vis-à-vis Batawana hegemony proved to be a politically sensitive issue in Gumare, the centre of the Kamanakao Association. For instance, the VDC in Gumare flatly refused to answer the question on whether or not ethnicity is an issue that would impact on their ability to carry out their mandate to implement development projects.

An analysis of VDC minutes in Maun suggests that a concerted effort is made by VDC members to be honest brokers aimed at mediating differences. The minutes reflect long and even redundant discussions on contentious issues aimed at reaching a consensus. The minutes suggest democratic participation and accommodation of divergent points of views by both women and men. The

Table 6. Ethnic distribution across and within VDCs in Ngamiland. N = 45

Ethnicity Across VDC	%	Ethnicity Within VDC	Dominant Group	%
WaYei	29	Gudigwa	BaSarwa	86
			Other	14
BaTawana	27	Seronga	WaYei	67
			HaMbukushu	33
HaMbukushu	18	Gumare	WaYei	43
			Other	30
			BaTawana	14
			BaSarwa	14
BaSarwa	16	Maun		
		Kubung	BaTawana	100
		Matlapana	BaTawana	20
		Bayei		60
		Other		20
Other	11	Etsha 6	HaMbukushu	86
			WaYei	14

protracted dialogue helps to prevent rather than exacerbate social conflict. Confrontational politics, regardless of the source, is shunned - as one member pointed out, abrasive communication styles belong to the “Freedom Square”. In this context, VDCs, akin to the kgotla, facilitate participatory governance and consensus building, a necessary although not sufficient condition for promoting an equitable distribution of scarce resources in order to promote the well-being of everyone.

Youth are encouraged to join VDCs and take up positions of responsibility. However, they are reluctant to join because they want to be paid for their time. In Gudigwa, there is a youth committee in the village that encourages them to take an active interest in village activities and eventually participate in VDC and other community projects. The current chairperson of Seronga VDC is a young person. Young people have generally better education and their participation would help boost the human capacity of the VDCs and increase their competence. It is ironic that VDCs help develop human resource capacity by providing accommodation for teachers, nurses and other professionals, yet due to poor employment opportunities, they are unable to retain that resource in a significant way.

Although youth do not appear to be enthusiastic about VDCs, this does not mean that the VDCs are deprived of inter-generational learning, a phenomenon that is important for institutional sustainability and community resilience. The individual survey reveals that a larger number of members (47%) are in the middle age group (30-49 years) compared to the elderly (44%) (50 years and above), even though the percentage differences are not significantly large. Focus group discussions suggest that the age balance between the middle age and elderly members was reached in the 1990s; prior to that time it was mostly elderly people who were active in initiating VDCs. Youth (18-29 years) appeared in the VDC scene in the late 1990s and early 2000. The current scenario is that VDCs are “three-generation” institutions, thus contributing to building community resilience. Inter-generational skills exchange and knowledge sharing seem to be a resource in this context.

3.2. The Dynamics of Office Tenure and Alliance

Officially, VDC members are elected into office every two years. However, the term of office regulations does not put a limit to the number of terms an individual can be re-elected. Individual surveys suggested that 31.1% were in their first term of office, 33.3 % in their second term, 15.6 % in their third term, 8.9% in their fourth term, 4.4% in the fifth term and 6.7% in sixth and above term in office. From focus group discussions, the minimum is one term (2 years) and the maximum is eight (16 years) (Table 7).

Table 7. Office Term. N = 45

OfficeTerm	Percentage of Total
1st	31
2nd	33
3rd	15.6
4th	8.9
5th	4.4
6th and above	6.7

These veterans have become adept negotiators, skilled at persuading sceptics and critics alike, and are competent community animators who get the job done due to their familiarity with the intricacies of institutional politics (village- or district-level). The art of mediation is political in a non-partisan way. Being re-elected into office three times and above signals different things to different people. On the other hand, re-election could also mean the entrenchment of autocracy, based for instance on group lethargy, individual authority derived from age or social status, or manipulative alliances among office bearers (especially between the chairperson, chief, councillors and the treasurer) to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its members.

Focus group discussions suggest that, in situations where a VDC is highly functional and has long-serving members, not only are elections democratically conducted at the kgotla, but the scheduled attendance of meetings is generally high and regular. Also, decision-making processes tend to be transparent; and the relationships between the chief, the VDC and the community, although not without differences, tend to be mutually accommodating. Conversely, dysfunctional VDCs tend to be ageist, sexist, ethnocentric and isolationist, and are characterised by undemocratic elections, and irregular and poorly attended membership meetings. Informal interviews with an officer in the Department of Social and Community Development in Gumare, for instance, gave an example of three VDCs in the Okavango Sub-District that were generally dysfunctional. Members of these VDCs have been in office for the past 6 years and never called for re-election. When pressured by social workers to call the election of new office bearers, the belligerents scornfully suggested that the officers should move from Gumare and set up their own VDC of loyalists. It turned out that the chairperson of the maverick VDC remains the only active (literate) member controlling the (non-literate) majority of elderly persons. In this scenario, the redeployment of human capital creates discord within and outside the group.

In Maun, focus group discussions revealed the existence and persistence of one autocratic VDC born out of an alliance between the incumbent chair, the councillor and the chief. Interestingly, the chairperson of the VDC in question did not participate in focus group discussions. When asked about how members were elected to office it became clear that the open kgotla procedure was

undemocratic due to the manipulation of the election process, which was described as classically overbearing. In this case the councillor was in the habit of infusing partisan politics not only in the election and decision-making processes of the VDC, but also in the selection and implementation of VDC-initiated community development projects. Members alleged that it was the chairperson, instead of the treasurer, who collected rentals from tenants in VDC houses. The chairperson also took it upon him/herself to redistribute donations made by NGOs to orphans, without the knowledge of other members. This raised questions about how recipients were selected. These actions were contrary to the VDC's regulations on how they should conduct their affairs and use funds, and regarding who collects from or donates to the public.

An analysis of the minutes of the mentioned VDC's meetings held between March 2002 to March 2003 indicated that no financial report was given in any of the 12 meetings recorded. By contrast, another VDC in Maun had 100% financial reporting reflected in the 10 scheduled meetings during the same period. Characteristically, weak relations tend to exist between this particular VDC with poor record keeping practices and the community. Informal discussions revealed that channelling public works employment opportunities was marred by dishonesty, intrigue and preferential treatment of one group against another.

3.3. Opening Up Spaces for Negotiating and Modifying the Official Script

In Ngamiland as elsewhere in Botswana, VDCs, as social institutions, influence the making and remaking of their own internal processes. Conversely, VDCs are influenced by external social or other institutional prescriptions or environmental exigencies. To some extent, the ability of the VDCs to carry out their functions depends on their members' ability to competently articulate their official functions in order to gain acceptance and legitimacy. VDC performance also depends on their ability to modify the official script and "rewrite" an implementable one in subtle and nuanced ways. This has enabled some of them to initiate non-traditional development projects such as the construction of physical infrastructure, addressing social development issues such as early childhood education, the development of community gardens and orchards to provide fruits and vegetables to villages, and embarking on eco-tourism projects. Both focus groups and individual interviews suggest that the majority (82%) of VDC members are knowledgeable about their official functions as prescribed in the VDC Handbook. This knowledge was not primarily acquired through the formal training workshops organised by the Department of Social and Community Development (S & CD). VDC skill development workshops, seminars and conferences run by the Department are few and far between; also there are no follow-up visits to consolidate the knowledge and skills imparted during these training sessions. The institutional distance between VDCs and S & CD force the former to acquire experience-based "job competency". This also means that a distinct body of local knowledge regarding the politics and practices of this institution has evolved over time.

Theoretically, ex-officio members, especially social workers, are supposed to provide technical input. In reality, VDCs basically survive through their own ingenuity and industriousness. An analysis of the minutes of 15 VDCs in Maun, for instance, indicates that social workers and councillors are virtually absent in VDC meetings (their attendance ranges between 10% - 30% of all scheduled meetings). This implies that VDC members make and implement decisions about community affairs uninfluenced by government operatives. In 2001, for instance, the open election system at the kgotla was officially replaced by a secret ballot. Social workers were supposed to implement these changes. Focus group discussions suggest that 71% of incumbent VDCs were

elected in the open system at the kgotla and only 25% did so through the secret ballot box, while the remaining were re-instated without due process. In the open system, voting is done by show of hands or standing behind the candidate (as it was done in the past). In the secret ballot, aspiring candidates submit an application to the office of Social and Community Development. Election is done through a secret ballot at the kgotla. In individual interviews, members in VDCs that used the secret ballot were asked whether or not they canvassed to be elected, within 25% saying they did and 75% that they did not; however, the secrecy of the ballot demands that the candidates campaign to be elected. This may be the beginning of the open politicisation of the VDCs along partisan lines.

Another interesting dynamic has to do with the reformulation of eligibility criteria for office bearers as stipulated in the VDC Handbook. These include educational qualification, age and 'permanent' residence. Focus groups revealed three informal eligibility criteria used at the kgotla as additional screening mechanisms. These are capability (bokgone), civility (botho), and social accountability through active participation in community activities (boikarabelo). VDC members identified competency or capability (bokgone) first (47%), followed by civility or botho (27%) and social accountability through active participation in community activities (20%). These criteria may appear mundane and uninteresting, but what is apparent - given the low level of human capital in VDCs - is that individuals are expected to bring into the institution social capital derived from active participation in community activities, such as belonging to other groups. These personal networks constitute social capital that helps to enhance the performance of the VDCs. Furthermore, development workers tend to take at face value (and pay attention to what they consider to be relatively formal) stated objectives and 'rules of the game'. Less attention is given to trying to understand what goes on beneath the surface, to hidden controversial issues that mask the contradictions between formal and informal rules, or to the written and emerging unwritten 'rules of the game', where mandated and ad hoc objectives and activities interface.

3.4. Performance Incentives or a Tragedy

In 1976 the government introduced a sitting allowance for VDC members attending scheduled meetings. There are eight scheduled meetings per year (this is standard practice). However, VDCs can call non-scheduled emergency meetings at any time. The condition for the council to disburse the allowance is that the secretary of the VDC must send a copy of the minutes to the S & CD Community Development Officer who is responsible for supervising them. Villages in the Okavango Sub-District send their minutes to Gumare, while those in Ngami Sub-District send theirs to Maun.

It is not surprising therefore that to the question, did the introduction of sitting allowance change the nature of participation in VDC meetings, the answer from focus groups was a qualified "yes" that depended on several factors. First, the introduction of a sitting allowance seems to have attracted the participation of youth. Second, attendance in scheduled meetings (with a sitting allowance) is higher than that for non-scheduled meetings (no sitting allowance). Third, some argue that people would still continue to volunteer in other community activities; the fact that there are many committees in villages that function without any remuneration implies that Batswana are willing to work for something that is of value to the community and worthy of their effort. In other words, they allege that the principle of *ipelegeng* (self-reliance) is still alive, although not necessarily as vibrant as in earlier times. Additionally, although scheduled VDC meetings attracted a sitting allowance, focus group discussions suggested that this is rather a spurious correlation because the allowance is a pittance and irregular, and yet meeting attendance still remains high. The

proponents of this line of argument emphasised that VDC work is more about commitment to voluntary public service and less about monetary gains. Others argue that the people are re-elected to the VDCs by villagers as a way of acknowledging their contribution to village development.

An analysis of the 2002/2003 minutes of scheduled meetings of the Matlapana VDC indicates a 90% average attendance for official members while that of ex officio members is only 10%. For Kubung VDC, the average is 72% while that of ex officio member is about 28%. Generally, the VDC executive has higher attendance rates (from 90% to 100%) than the general meeting for ordinary members (70% to 100%). Whether or not the low participation of ex officio members of VDCs can be attributed to the fact that they do not receive a sitting allowance remains an open question. However, regardless of the legitimacy of contributing factors, the lower level of participation of ex officio members minimises their influence on VDC decision-making processes. This situation gives VDCs relative autonomy to push their development agenda within the limits of their capability (*bokgone*). The receipt of monetary reward is mostly irregular, in part due to poor record-keeping and in part due to sluggish bureaucratic procedures at the district council which have to be followed. The processing of claims, especially for VDCs in remote areas, is a disabling phenomenon since remuneration for participation per se is predictable.

The counter-argument to this was that, if the sitting allowance were to be removed, the VDC's official status as a community development institution would collapse. This argument states that people had been providing voluntary labour for three decades, and that they were tired; that only old people would volunteer; and that - without the youth - the institution would be deprived of much needed human capital and doomed to failure. This is a more pragmatic view which takes into account the fact that most Batswana have been drawn into the cash economy and that it is unrealistic to expect some social groups to be perpetual volunteers while others are salaried. As far as this group is concerned, Botswana's principle of *ipelegeng* has long expired.

However, in both individual interviews and focus group discussions, the desire for VDCs to be salaried for their work was overwhelmingly positive. Members strongly felt that the VDCs had contributed significantly to the 'upkeep' of Botswana's development administration since the country's independence. However, although their efforts appear to be institutionally invisible, their workload and responsibilities tend to be ever increasing, and they are called upon to carry out complex development challenges in contemporary Tswana society. In other words, transforming an allowance into a regular salary would reflect the dynamism of the institution as well as be an official acknowledgement (by making it visible) of the development upkeep role which has remained unacknowledged (invisible) for over four decades. Paid work will not only bring national level visibility but individual dignity in the face of peers, family and community. As one respondent from Seronga put it:

“When you leave your homestead in the morning, you leave children with nothing, then you come back at the end of the day, bringing home nothing. But, if the rains are good, you get your reward from the field, your children don't suffer the pangs of hunger. If there is drought, you still go and gather (*go bapala*) from the wild something that is of value to the family. VDC work is worse than drought, you bring nothing to the children!”

How exactly is VDC work 'worse than drought'? Respondents pointed out that transport, food and accommodation are paid for VDC members who have been invited to attend seminars and work-

shops outside their respective villages. Thereafter they return to their homes empty-handed. In some VDCs, members actually pay from their own pockets to do government work, yet they cannot make a claim or be reimbursed. The majority of VDC members feel that the way government treats them mocks their service since it brings no privileges (such as savings or social welfare schemes, access to credit, or terminal benefits such as a small gratuity). When a VDC member dies on duty, the family members get nothing, yet government officials are entitled to compensation. Matlapana VDC gave an example of the death of one of their long-serving members, who had recently died, and lamented that no government officials attended the funeral. Yet these were the very people who demand services of the VDC chair during their countless “official visits”. They also pointed out that, although other village-level institutions such as burial societies exist in Maun to help households during times of family crisis, the VDC is not allowed to set up an emergency fund since the institution is considered to act as the trustees of public funds. The mixing of private and public trusteeship would blur responsibilities, and ultimately cause unnecessary confusion if not outright conflict of interest.

From focus groups it was learned that VDC members consider themselves to be the unsung heroes at the bottom rung of the civil service ladder since, as they argue, they too work on a daily basis like other government officers, such as when supervising the delivery of social relief projects. The major complaint was that salaried parliamentarians and councillors unceremoniously cut strips of VDC members knowledge and experience for free to market themselves for a price. The underlying sentiment, rightly or wrongly, is that VDCs have been subsidising government and politicians for too long. It is therefore not surprising that VDC work is symbolised as “chronic drought” that continues to induce social humiliation and vulnerability to poverty. For VDC members, a regular salary represents more than monetary gain – it represents social respect and self-empowerment like any other job in a local institution, such as the land-board does. Even having the sitting allowance increased would be an acceptable alternative.

As one respondent put it, volunteering is for people with money, not for the poor. Does this statement negate VDC members from accepting the responsibility of developing their villages instead of leaving that to district government officers? Not necessarily. The spirit of *ipelegeng* in 1965/66, when the Constitution of Botswana was written, thrived when the country was ranked by the World Bank as the poorest in the world. The majority of Botswana were relatively poor then. The same demand cannot be made to thrive in the 21st century under the disguise of volunteerism (*go ithaopa*), decades after the country has been reclassified as middle income, even if almost half of the population lives under the poverty datum line. VDCs are just attempting to articulate verifiable income differentials. A stark reality of deprivation haunts Botswana today.

However, not everything is bleak. The groups were further asked whether there were other non-material indirect benefits that emanate from participating in VDCs. The answer to the question was the affirmative. Participation in VDCs was regarded as part of the learning curve in one’s life cycle. The forum was seen to create opportunities that could not be valued in monetary terms only, such as the prospect of acquiring knowledge and skills regarding the workings of government departments, non-governmental organisations, public speaking, botho (civility), tolerance of differences in people’s abilities, propagation of consensus-building and an anti-corruption ethos, conflict resolution, dialogue, and networking with different organisations/institutions and people inside and outside the village.

3.5. Summary

The VDC formal structure has been standardised over the past four decades. While some aspects remain prescribed, such as official membership, the duration of tenure and the performance of official functions, others have been reviewed and are fraught with implementation problems, such as the enforcement of new eligibility criteria (education and residence), and mechanisms for electing members to the institution. The National Settlement Policy (1998) defines what a gazetted and non-gazetted settlement is in accordance with a hierarchy of settlement size (primary, secondary or tertiary). The provision of social services (education, health, water) tends to follow this definition. In Ngamiland, 50% of the population lives in non-gazetted settlements. Where it is not possible to have direct representation in a primary or secondary settlement, residents of rural localities often set up what is known as an 'Action VDC' or 'unofficial VDC'. Some Action VDCs have been instrumental in the "villagisation" of rural settlements. In other words, they actively encourage permanent migration and settlement in meraka (cattle posts) or masimo (farm-lands), and the transformation of these from ungazetted to gazetted villages. They encourage people to settle permanently, lobby the tribal administration in primary centres to appoint and install a chief or headman, and to have a kgotla constructed.

VDC members are "average" Batswana. Over half of them rear livestock and farm. Few are in formal employment (bricklaying, teaching, security, hospitality, construction or cleaning services, drought relief and small scale enterprises). With regard to social status, both married and unmarried women and men participate. However, few young people participate. Gender analysis of VDC membership suggests that there are slightly more women than men. Although women form the majority in VDCs, males tend to be chairpersons while women control the VDC finances as treasurers and manage the flow of information as secretaries. Internal gender dynamics in VDCs reflect some aspects of the redefinition of gender relations, trade-offs, compromise and negotiation. Resource access is often based on cultural expectations and the roles women and men play in the everyday social life of the community. Men and women in VDCs use different gendered strategies to "gain entry" and negotiate access to resources from formal institutions. In terms of human capital development, VDCs, especially in rural and remote areas, attract illiterate to semi-literate members. VDCs have therefore low human capital. However, in VDCs, educational attainment as human capital is transformed from strictly an individual to a shared community resource. VDCs also create opportunities for informal learning, networking, mutual support, and information-sharing and knowledge production.

VDC membership in Ngamiland also reflects diverse ethnic participation. From this perspective, VDCs foster a positive cultural identity. There was no evidence to suggest failure by VDCs to deliver a public good as a result of either internal or external strife fuelled by ethnic differences. VDC members in all the localities affirmed that they encourage ethnic minority groups to take over VDC leadership.

Some VDC members are active in cultural organisations and others in partisan political organisations. But they insist that a VDC is not a forum for expressing any parochial views, whether based on ethnicity, religious preference or political affiliation. VDC members are therefore not necessarily naïve to social differences, but are aware of potential conflicts that these can fuel if not treated with sensitivity. Concerted effort is made by VDC members to mediate these differences.

Officially, VDC members are elected into office every two years. However, term of office regulations do not put a limit to the number of terms an individual can serve. The survey indicated that

some members served two terms (4 years) and others eight terms (16 years). Some VDCs are highly functional and democratic, while others are dysfunctional, ageist, sexist, ethnocentric, isolationist, and undemocratic.

VDCs have eight scheduled meetings per year that attract a sitting allowance. Receipt of monetary reward is mostly irregular, in part due to poor record keeping and in part due to the sluggish bureaucratic procedures at the district council that have to be followed. The processing of claims, especially for VDCs in remote areas, is a disabling phenomenon since remuneration for participation per se is predictable. Some members contend that if the sitting allowance is terminated, VDCs would collapse. Others argue that the fact that there are people who participate in many committees in their respective villages that do not provide any remuneration implies that Batswana are willing to work for something which is of value to their community. There was consensus, however, that VDCs members should be salaried for their work.

In a sense, the preferred open election system at the kgotla “reinstates” the centrality of the institution, rather than the S & CD, in legitimising VDCs in the eyes of the community. A VDC is a social institution. It is therefore not static, but has agency, although constrained by externally defined rules. With the kgotla open election system, community members nominate a candidate and openly justify why they think the nominee is eligible over and above the official criteria of age, education and residence. It is not the candidate who has to convince the rest that s/he qualifies, the ultimate outcome is beyond the control of the candidate. Without doubt, the new “secret” system is opening up VDCs to unbridled partisan politics, favouritism and other biases which may not be in the interests of some social groups who hold different political views. Like other institutions, VDCs are not perfect. Every system has its own flaws.

Local institutions such as VDCs provide a negotiating space in which members can play a mediating role in the allocation of, and competition for, resources. Their internal dynamics both challenge as well as subscribe to external directives. VDCs as social institutions are structures of facilitation that also constrain the agency of individuals and groups. VDCs engender community processes, which, like in any other social process, are thus characterised by conflict and co-operation as the rules of the game change. VDCs invariably translate, transform, abridge and invert rules and regulations to create new possibilities and opportunities for members. Like other subordinate institutions, VDCs sometimes subtly challenge government regulations by disallowing crude political interference and manipulation. Occasionally they win, but more often than not they lose out. At times they collude and consent, and other times they use local discretion to accommodate local realities in order to optimise access to resources and opportunities.

Chapter 4 - Mediating Access to Natural Resources and Social Services

A range of institutions affect people’s livelihoods, and different livelihood strategies are affected by particular linkages that occur among institutions that influence community/household access to natural capital such as water, land, veld products, fish, wildlife, grazing grounds, grass thatch, and to social welfare services. A range of policies at different levels of government affect household decisions regarding how to make use of the assets at their disposal. This chapter examines the mediating role of the VDC in this process.

4.1. Access to Natural Resources

A VDC has no mandate to allocate natural resources. The government has noted this limitation as a serious setback. Reference is made in the National Development Plan (NDP) 9 2003/04- 2008/09 (Botswana Government, 2003: 399) that VDCs need to be statutorily empowered in order to improve their capacity to delivery services and manage resources. However, for the time being specific institutions and government departments, such as the Tawana Land Board (in Ngamiland), Agricultural Resources Board, Department of Water Affairs and so on, have the mandate to regulate access to natural resources. VDCs need to work with or through these departments and institutions. Table 8 shows institutions that are central to the control and allocation of such resources.

Table 8. Government departments and the management of natural resources.

Resource	Institutions
Water	Land board, Department of Water Affairs
Grazing	Agricultural Resources Board
Arable land	Land Board
Residential land	Land Board
Reeds	Local administration, Agricultural Resources Board (ARB)
Thatching Grass	Local administration, Agricultural Resources Board (ARB)
Poles	Local administration, Agricultural Resources Board (ARB)
Fish	Department of Fisheries, Fisherman’s co-operative
Game	Community Trust, Department of Wildlife and National Parks
Scenic tourism	Community Trust, Land Board
Veld Products	Local administration, Agricultural Resources Board (ARB)

Although VDCs have little control over direct access to natural resources, some community based natural resource management (CBNRM) constitutions in Ngamiland either provide for the VDC chairperson and secretary, or co-opt the entire VDC, to be ex-officio members of their Village Trust Committees (VTCs) or Boards of Trustees. In this institutional arrangement, VDCs become indirectly involved in natural resource management as provided for by CBNRM CBO constitutions. In addition, since community trusts are legal entities and have statutory powers over resource utilisation in their jurisdictions, and although VDCs have no legal backing, they nonetheless have official authority/legitimacy. However, taking into account that one of the major

drives of economic growth in Ngamiland is tourism, VDC relationships with CBNRM institutions need to be explored further. There is a notable absence of partnerships with business and NGOs. In Gudigwa some older members of VDC are also on the Board of Trustees of the Bukhakwe Cultural Association, which runs the Gudigwa tourist camp, and hence they are directly involved in natural resource management. These experienced VDC members are influential and have become skilled negotiators with respect to access to key natural resources and services, such as land for farming, grazing and commercial ventures. VDCs therefore redeploy their official status as important community brokers, negotiators and advocates for increased access to natural resources (land, veld products, reeds, grass, poles and so on), in partnership with other village-level institutions (including CBNRM CBOs) and government departments. The brokerage role is likely to differ between VDCs in rural and remote areas and those located in urban villages.

4.1.1. Access to Water

Water is a scarce resource in Botswana, and the state is responsible for its allocation. The government's development challenge is to have this scarce resource accessible and affordable to ordinary Botswana. Virtually all officially recognised villages in Botswana have a water supply scheme (Kelekwang and Gowera, 2003). In urban villages, water supply is the responsibility of the Department of Water Affairs. The Department of Water Resources (DWR) supplies all the 17 main villages in Botswana, including district headquarters such as Maun and Gumare. The Water Utilities Corporation provides water in urban areas, while the District Council Water Unit is responsible for the water supply in rural villages. The Land Board allocates land for drilling boreholes, whereas the issuing of water rights is the responsibility of the Water Apportionment Board (Arntzen, Kgathi & Segosebe, 1999).

There are several sources of water for communities in Ngamiland. These are piped outdoor (standpipes), piped indoors, communal taps, bowser/tanker, well, borehole, river/stream, dam/pan, rainwater tank and spring water. Boreholes and hand-dug wells are usually the sources of groundwater in remote rural villages, cattle-posts and agricultural settlements (masimo). In Maun 55% of the population is served by standpipes and 45% by private connections. Given that Maun has 15 wards, each ward has about six or seven standpipes. A survey undertaken in the Sehitwa area revealed that 65% of the owners of boreholes and hand-dug wells had obtained them through the Land Board, whereas 22% and 10% had obtained them through inheritance and purchasing, respectively. The remaining owners (3%) had obtained the boreholes and wells through other means (Fidzani, 1998). According to the Department of Water Affairs Report (2002/2003 April-September), there are 98 standpipes and 496 private connections in Sehitwa.

VDCs play an indirect advocacy role for the provision of water in several ways. This role includes approaching either the District Council Water Unit to request the installation of standpipes in various strategic parts of the village in order to maximise access, or to re-open standpipes which have been cut off for one reason or another. Usually, closing connections is done without consulting village residents, and households are left stranded. VDCs may also request that the number of standpipes be increased in certain areas. Some VDCs organise the village to maintain standpipes and other facilities, such as boreholes and wells, by constructing structures around them so as to prevent water contamination, competing use or damage by domestic animals. The maintenance of community infrastructure (physical capital) by VDCs, although generally going unnoticed in official circles, inculcates a sense of civic responsibility and democratises development. Table 9 below summarises an audit of access to water resources in the research sites.

Table 9. Access to water resources in the research sites.

Resource	Shorobe	Seronga	Etsha 6	Sehitwa	Gumare South	Gudigwa	Maun				
							Matlapana	Kubung	Boseja	Boyei	Thito
Water	10 SP 18 PC B/hole River Dams Wells	18 S/P 15 PC B/hole River Wells Dam	14 SP 36 PC B/hole River Wells Dam	14 SP 101 PC B/hole Well Dam	7 SP 172 PC River B/hole	4 SP Wells	3 SP	8 SP	7 SP	9 SP	4 SP

Legend: SP = Standpipe, PC = private connection

4.1.2. Access to Land

With regard to access to land, as a general practice Subordinate Land Boards do not consult village-level committees on the allocation of residential or farming plots on communal land. VDC members apply for residential plots like everyone else and go through designated land overseers. As a collective, however, VDCs apply for land for community projects, and these are generally approved. There are exceptions, however, when the Subordinate Land Board may drag its feet on the issue for one reason or another. Also, when there are unoccupied spaces in between housing compounds, the Land Board usually consults with the VDC to establish ownership of the space in question. In Gudigwa, the VDC indicated that sometimes they give potential investors a chance to scout an area and indicate available and more suitable sites for business activities. Once the VDC and the chief endorse a location, a formal application with the Land Board can be filed, which is usually approved. Again, in facilitating/promoting the diversification of the local economy at micro level, VDCs influence, directly or indirectly, household choices regarding sustaining the well-being of members.

4.1.3. Control of Bush Fires, Harvesting of Veld Products, and Solid Waste Management

Some VDCs participate actively in controlling forest and bush fires. They are most likely to receive “intelligence” information about those who cause fires, especially if they are village residents. This information is passed to the Botswana Local Police for further investigation. (These are village-based as opposed to the central government-based Botswana Police Service.) The Matlapana VDC made firebreaks from Samedupe to Lekgothwane. The Matlapana VDC worked with Tshomarelo Tikologo, an environmental NGO based in Gaborone, to make fire breaks and build walls around standpipes. In Sehitwa, the VDC pays someone to alert residents of the outbreak of fires and helps organise people to extinguish them. Some VDCs also intervene by providing material relief to households victimised by domestic fires. VDCs hold kgotla meetings where discussions are held about preventing forest fires, and where decisions are made on the appropriate time for harvesting grass and reeds, and on the prevention of their over-harvesting. In Gudigwa, the VDC discourages grass-harvesters from leaving piles of harvested grass in the bush as waste, as this may contribute to fire hazards. Other VDCs contribute indirectly to solid waste management. They help the District Council to identify strategic locations for rubbish drums in various wards. In Sehitwa and Shorobe, not only have the VDCs identified a dumpsite, but they also helped hire and supervise local donkey cart owners to collect and carry the rubbish from the village to the dumpsite. The District Council pays the garbage collector, and the VDC supervises him to make sure that he does his job regularly.

4.2. Access to Social Services

4.2.1. Health

The Government of Botswana follows a Primary Health Care (PHC) strategy that lays emphasis on affordability and accessibility of medical services offered by a very elaborate primary health-care system. The PHC strategy is a five-tier public health system. Central government is in charge of referral hospitals (such as Princess Marina in Gaborone, Nyangabgwe in Francistown and Lobatse Mental Hospital), and District Hospitals (such as one in Maun), and Primary Hospitals (such as the one in Gumare). The District Council is responsible for clinics (those with or without maternity wards) and health posts (staffed by one nurse practitioner and family welfare educators) and mobile clinics. As the name suggests, a mobile clinic goes to a village on scheduled visits. Mobile clinics target hard to reach remote area communities without access to any form of formal health care facility. Table 10 indicates the five-tier public health system and type of services provided in each facility. Access to health in the study areas conforms to this five-tier service provision hierarchy.

Table 10. Five-tier primary health care system in Botswana.

Facility	Services	Description	Location and Population
Mobile Stop	Limited PHC services	No fixed facilities	Very remote areas
Health Post	Community based worker at first contact Primary health care including family planning, environmental health, maternal/child health, first aid treatment of common diseases, case finding/follow-up, periodic visits by mobile health teams	3 rooms and a toilet Staff house in remote areas	500–1,000 in rural area (Gudigwa, Matlapana, Boseja, Kubung, Boseja)
Clinic without maternity	Maternal/child health, preventive work (as health post), diagnosis and treatment of common diseases, simple lab work, case finding/follow-up with emphasis on TB	5 rooms, covered area, toilets, vehicle and 2 staff houses	5,000–10,000 in rural area; 10,000 or more in major villages and towns
Clinic with maternity	As above, including deliveries	As above plus maternity unit, vehicle and 3 staff houses	As above. Maternity ward depends on area's needs. (Seronga, Etsha 6, Sehitwa)
Primary Hospital	As at clinic. Supervision of clinics and health posts, general in-patient care, lab tests, X-rays and surgery	20–70 beds, 4–12 maternity beds, 16–58 general beds, out-patient facilities	Mainly in villages and remote areas. Depends on area's need. (Gumare)
District	As at primary hospital, but with Specialist services for serious and complicated health problems; preventive, curative and rehabilitative care; in-patient care for more complicate health needs	Hospital on a larger scale, 70–400 beds	Major villages and towns (Maun)
National Referral HP	As district hospitals, specialist clinical services	400+ beds	Gaborone, Francistown, and Lobatse

Source: Maun Planning Area Development Plan (1997-2021).

VDCs have lobbied for, and have been instrumental in either the provision of health posts or the upgrading of a health facility from one level to another (such as from a mobile stop to a health post, or from a clinic without to a clinic with maternity). The VDC in Seronga, for instance, takes pride in having worked hard to achieve the latter. In Gudigwa, the VDC was instrumental in advocating for a health post. Prior to the construction of the facility, Gudigwa residents used to go to Seronga. Some VDCs request that more clinics be built in their villages due to the gradual increase of population within the village and/or in the adjoining localities. In total, Maun has one district hospital, one clinic with maternity, seven clinics without maternity, and 15 health posts (14 with a nurse and one without a nurse). Ngami Sub-District has 24 mobile health posts. Gumare has one primary hospital, four clinics with maternity and one without maternity, nine health posts with a nurse and seven without a nurse, and 33 mobile health posts in the sub-district.

Access to health services poses a serious challenge in Ngamiland. The challenge is compounded by the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Chapter Six provides an overview of the evolution of VDCs and their role in facilitating the development of physical capital. Their biggest challenge is to find a niche within the five-tier health service provision hierarchy. But the dominance of the medical model seems to have stifled any innovative intervention, especially in the context of the AIDS epidemic. Community partnership with government and NGOs (such as the Maun Counselling Centre, Botswana Family Welfare Association, and Tebelelopele Voluntary Counselling and Testing) and the private sector could, for instance, improve access to rapid testing and information on prevention. But progress has been slow due to the dominance of formal government institutions in delivery of health services.

VDCs also play a minor but important role in two programmes - the Orphan Care and Community Home Based Care (CHBC) programmes provided for by the National Policy on HIV/AIDS. The Policy outlines a national response to the epidemic, describes the roles of various government ministries, and forms the basis for a strategic plan that is used by ministries and organisations. At district level, the District Health Committee (DHC) is responsible for the management and coordination of HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation, and the integration of HIV/AIDS in district plans. The District Health Planning Committee (DHPC) is the focal point for decision-making in health matters at the district level. There is also the District Extension Team (DET) whose membership consists of senior officers at district headquarters. Village Extension Teams (VET) promote communication amongst extension staff in order to facilitate coordination and integration of programmes. VDCs work closely with and coordinate the work of the VET.

All villages in the research sites have access to basic general out-patient primary health care, prevention, diagnosis and the treatment of common diseases. Access to and affordability of specialist services for serious and complicated health problems (including HIV and AIDS) still remain a challenge since these are based in district and national referral hospitals in Maun or Francistown.

4.2.2. Social Welfare Benefits

After an assessment of a person's medical condition, if s/he is found to be terminally ill, s/he is referred by a doctor or hospital social worker to the Department of Social Services. Social workers conduct a comprehensive socio-economic assessment of the patient, and if the conclusion is that the patient needs material assistance on medical ground, the person is registered as a home-based care patient under the Ministry of Health Community Based Home-based Care Programme (CHBC). A registered community home-based care patient is a person who has been declared a

terminally ill person (TIP) by a medical practitioner and who is unable to work because of his/her health condition. The following statistics indicate the percentage of recipients of the CHBC food basket in proportion to the total population of the research sites: Gudigwa 2%, Etsha 6 0.15%, Sehitwa 1.4%, Seronga 2.4%, Shorobe 1%, Gumare 0.21% and Maun 1.24% (Table 11). Generally the clinic-based home-based care unit takes care of terminally ill HIV/AIDS patients. There is very little contact with VDCs in the delivery of the home-based care 'food basket'. However, in Gudigwa, the VDC requested two volunteers to work with the HBC to ensure that patients receive their food rations.

A rapid increase in the number of orphaned children in Botswana since the 1990s has been one of the major challenges for VDCs. As adult mortality increases due to the AIDS pandemic, so does the possibility of social displacement of surviving dependents - especially children - from established family relations. According to the 2001 population census there are 40,994 orphans in Botswana, of which 20,496 were males and 20,498 females. The numbers have been gradually increasing over the years. One of the key features of the Revised National Policy on HIV and AIDS (1998) is that the Ministry of Local Government assumed the primary responsibility for carrying out eligibility assessments for destitution support for orphans and people living with HIV and AIDS (GoB/UNDP, 2000:43). A wide range of provisions was made for orphans. These include a Review Destitute Policy (2002) (Botswana Government, 2002) to make special provisions for AIDS orphans for community-based material support within the extended family system; the incorporation of AIDS orphans into the Children and Adoption Acts to strengthen organisations that work for the protection of orphans against all forms of exploitation and abuse; and the development of guidelines for fostering AIDS orphans. Social Welfare Officers were charged with the responsibility of registering orphans and destitute persons. Orphan Care Desk Officers are subsequently appointed in each district. The Food Nutrition Unit, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, puts together a food basket for registered orphans and other children in need of special nutritional care.

The highest incidence of orphans is in Ngamiland West with about 4% of its population. In the research sites, registered orphans as a proportion of the village population were as follows: Gudigwa 4.2%, Etsha 6 6.2%, Sehitwa 5.4%, Seronga 7.1%, Shorobe 9.4%, Gumare 3.62% and Maun 5.11% (Table 11). A household with registered orphans receives a food basket worth P216.00 per month.

The majority of orphans are non-institutional, that is they are absorbed into existing kinship networks. Generally, VDCs have a long history of identifying and facilitating the assessment and registration of indigent persons by social workers. VDCs use their knowledge to identify, and refer to social workers, households that have unregistered orphans or whose caregivers are reluctant to have them registered (out of fear of stigmatisation). Social workers do the assessment. Some VDCs also supervise the delivery of orphan food baskets by designated suppliers. In Matlapana the VDC also identifies households with undernourished children and gives the information to family welfare educators (FWE), who then assess and register them to receive tsabana. In the research sites, 18.3% of eligible children in Gudigwa, 19.6% in Etsha 6, 22.1% in Sehitwa, 19.2% in Seronga, 15.8% in Shorobe, 13.8% in Gumare and 7.40 % in Maun received tsabana (Table 11).

Some orphans are socially neglected, abandoned or abused children. The VDC usually acts as a watchdog to ensure that such children do not fall through holes in the social safety net by making informal referrals to social workers and FWEs. Social workers can then compile a social enquiry report which indicates the difficult circumstances a child experiences, for further action by the magistrate. VDCs have less to offer to children who have been totally disengaged from society,

such as street children, although VDCs may identify abused or neglected children “in need of care”. These may be institutionalised or provided with government support within the extended family system. The VDC’s intervention expands opportunities for orphans to have access to basic resources, such as food and clothing. These in turn contribute to the development of the human capital of orphans, especially with regard to school enrolment and retention (Ngwenya and Phaladze, 2004).

4.2.3. Household Well-Being and Poverty

How communities in a given socio-economic and political environment define and measure well-being varies. For some communities in rural areas, well-being may mean just having enough to eat, shelter for a family and basic level of security. For others in urban settings, household well-being means the ability to achieve and sustain food and income security. Poverty can also be thought of as an ‘inadequate’ livelihood outcome. This could be due to inadequate access to assets such as land, water, credit and social support. It may be due to living in a hazardous area, thus subjecting the household to acute vulnerability. It could be caused by policies, institutions and processes that are not supportive of achieving an adequate livelihood (Messer and Townsley, 2003).

Although the Government of Botswana has expanded people’s access to social services by stepping up investment spending in social development programmes, the incidence of poverty in Botswana is still high. This suggests that government is failing to redistribute national resources equitably. Poverty is influenced by poor access to and control of resources, limited economic opportunities, and social barriers experienced by different social groups. The government has devised anti-poverty policies and programmes whose objective is to expand the opportunities and life choices of Botswana, and to decentralise and increase citizen participation in decision-making. Government social provision is in the form of legislation and social service programmes aimed at minimising social risks arising from increased incidences of poverty.

The Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons (2002) is the most relevant to VDC resource mediation and advocacy functions. The objective of the Policy is to provide assistance to people categorised as destitute. VDCs assist in identifying the destitute and recommending them for assessment and registration by social workers. Once registered, the destitute is eligible for government assistance and services. The services provided to the permanently destitute include repatriation (the repatriating District Council pays the expenses of relocating a registered destitute person to another locality, if, during the assessment, it is determined that the person has relatives or caregivers who have committed themselves, in writing, to arranging accommodation and support for him/her), and funeral expenses (the District Council pays for a standard pauper’s coffin, and up to a maximum of three nights of mortuary fees). However, if the relatives of the deceased destitute person wish to claim the body for burial elsewhere, they will be required to pay all mortuary fees.

Permanent destitute persons and their dependents are exempted from any fees related to health care provided at council clinics and government hospitals, as well as from publicly provided service fees such as water service levies, etc. The councils pay travel expenses for health, educational and rehabilitation programmes. These include the provision of transport to and from school at the beginning and end of each school term for school children of destitutes who are boarders. Basic shelter is made available if the destitute person is assessed to be in need. In essence, VDCs have helped identify destitute people in the study areas, and by so doing they facilitated access to government assistance.

Table 11. Government safety programmes and target populations.

Social Benefits	Per cent of Village Population							Per cent of Target Group Population in Maun						
	Gudigwa N=732	Etsha 6 N=2629	Sehitwa N=1478	Seronga N=1641	Shorobe N=995	Gumare N=6067	Maun N=43776	Boseja	Kubung	Thito	Boyei	Matlapana		
Orphan Food Basket	31 (4.2%)	164 (6.2%)	80 (5.4%)	127 (7.1%)	90 (9.4%)	220 (3.62%)	2 240 (5.11%) ¹⁴	344 (15.3%)	38 (1.69%)	161 (7.18%)	164 (7.18)	60 (2.67%)		
Tsabana*	134 (18.3%)	515 (19.6%)	327 (22.1%)	315 (19.2%)	151 (15.8%)	839 (13.8%)	3 242 (7.40%)	819 (25.2%)	146 (4.5%)	400 (12.33%)	501 (15.45%)	310 (9.56%)		
Permanent destitute allowance	14 (1.9%)	41 (1.6%)	60 (4%)	40 (2.4%)	106 (11%)	163 (2.68%)	1 071 (2.5%)	162 (15.12%)	56 (5.2%)	69	36 (3.36%)	26		
Old age pension	4 (0.5%)	341 (13%)	287 (19.4%)	200 (11.2%)	247 (26%)	470 (7.74%)	Maun 1,675 (3.8%)							
Home based care patients**	15 (2%)	4 (0.15%)	21 (1.4%)	40 (2.4%)	10 (1%)	13 543 (0.21%)	120 (1.24%)	20 (22.09%)	129 (3.68%)	86 (23.75%)	14 (15.8%)	14 (2.57%)		

* Feeding supplement for children

** Food basket

In the research sites, the following statistics indicate the percentage of permanently destitute in the total population: Gudigwa 1.9%, Etsha 6 1.6%, Sehitwa 4%, Seronga 4.2%, Shorobe 11%, Gumare 2.68% and Maun 2.5%. Shorobe appears to have a higher incidence of destitutes as a proportion of the population.

Levels and types of assistance for permanently destitute persons include a nutritionally balanced diet food ration based on a minimum daily calorie requirement of 1750 calories; a cash component of P55 per month; personal hygiene items that include toilet soaps, toothpaste, toothbrush or body lotion, washing soap, etc.; and fee exemption as noted above. Basic improvements to sanitary facilities either inside or outside the dwelling are provided, and the rehabilitation of existing structures is done where possible.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that VDCs are instrumental in helping realise the central government policy objectives of establishing linkages between community home-based care and the destitute policy, and in supporting activities that promote community based initiatives leading to the normal growth and development of orphans.

4.2.4. Education

There has been a rapid reduction in Botswana of the percentage of people who have never been to school as a result of the phenomenal expansion of education infrastructure since Independence. The Revised National Policy on Education (1994) provides for universal access to education and for improvements in vocational training. Education is the single largest expenditure item in the fiscal budget, averaging more than a fifth of the total. In 2003, it accounted for 24% of the total fiscal spending, up from 22% in 1981. At present, Botswana has achieved universal access to primary education. From 1995-2000, the estimated net enrolment rate (NER) for children aged 7-13 was consistently above 95%, peaking at 100% in 1999 and 2000. Over the same period, the gross enrolment rate (GER) was 11% higher than the NER, in part because some children start school late but also because some dropouts return to school (Millennium Development Goals Status Report, 2004:29).

The 2003 Adult Literacy Survey (CSO, 2004) results indicate that the National Adult Literacy Rate was 81% among people 15 years of age and over. This is an increase of 12% (from 68.9%) in 1993. The gender desegregation showed a female adult literacy rate of 82% compared to 80% for males. However, adult literacy rates vary according to district, with over 90% in cities and towns (with Orapa having the highest rate of 98%). The lowest rates were recorded in Kweneng West with 58% (64% males and 53% females) and Gantsi District with 60% (64% and 56% females) (CSO, 2003). According to the 2001 population census, 13.2% of males and 10.7% of females in urban centres have never been to school, 24.5% of males and 19.4% of females in major villages, and 33.9% of males and 31.9% of females in rural villages. In the Northwest (which includes Ngamiland), 33% of males and 40% of females have never attended school, compared to 37.3% for males and 33.6% for females in Kweneng. Ngamiland therefore tends to have a high rate of female illiteracy.

VDCs have been in the forefront of facilitating access to education, in particular primary and early childhood education. There are indications that some VDCs are beginning to be aware of the need to facilitate the provision of education for children with disabilities as well as adult education to enhance functional literacy in their respective communities. In Gudigwa, not only did the VDC put pressure on the government to deliver primary education as promised (and mobilised the com-

munity to be involved in its construction), it also continued to encourage parents to allow their children to attend and stay in school. Adult educators have used VDC community halls for running literacy classes. As already indicated, Ngamiland has a high illiteracy rate compared to the national average and to other districts.

In Maun, the Matlapana VDC plans to take over a private primary school and run it as a trust. The idea of the take-over is to improve the quality of education. The realisation of this dream remains to be seen. The VDC has also acquired a plot for the construction of a new school. The Matlapana VDC intends to have another primary school built at Sexaxa in order to reduce the distance children walk between home and school (Table 12).

Table 12. Access to formal and tertiary education in research villages.

Service	Shorobe	Seronga	Etsha 6	Sehitwa	Gumare South	Gudigwa	Maun
Formal and Tertiary Education	1 PS	1 PS	1 PS	1 PS	1 PS	1 PS	12 PS
		1 CJSS	1 CJSS	1 CJSS	2 CJSS 1 Brigade		6 CJSS 3 SSS 1 VTC 1 Brigade

Legend: PS = Primary school, CJSS = Community Junior Secondary School, SSS = Senior Secondary School, VTC = Vocational Training Centre.

Access to non-formal education in Ngamiland, where it is needed most, is still constrained. As we indicated above, adult educators in villages rely on community halls constructed by VDCs to run literacy classes. Shorobe has eight literacy groups, Seronga five (although only three are said to be functional), Sehitwa has three, Gudigwa none, and Maun has 31 functioning groups (Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE), Maun, 2003). Data from the DNFE in Maun and Gumare suggest that the majority of literacy group members and literacy group leaders (LGL) are women. Each literacy group has approximately 15 members. With regard to occupation, the majority are farmers, the next largest group being unemployed. In Sehitwa in 2003, 73% were farmers and 21% were unemployed; in Shorobe, 50% were farmers and 48% unemployed; whereas in Maun, 18.3% were farmers, 11.6% were self-employed, 28.4% were in formal employment, and 41.5% were unemployed (Table 13). An informal interview with an officer in the DNFE in Maun indicates that learners excel in mathematics and Setswana. As already noted in Chapter 3, these functional

Table 13. Literacy groups. N = 15

Village	Occupation	
	Farming	Other
Sehitwa	73% farmers	21% unemployed
Shorobe	50% farmers	48% unemployed
Maun	18.3% farmers	41.5 % unemployed 28.4% formal employment 11.6% self employed

literacy skills are suitable for self-employment and as treasurer or secretary in the VDC. Provision for adult literacy improves human capital development and empowers particularly women in these villages.

4.2.5. Telecommunications and Public Transport

VDCs also play an important mediating function in transport and communications. Media institutions and organisations have a significant impact on community life through the links they can provide and the opportunities they can create. The availability of mass media ruptures physical and non-physical barriers, and promotes cooperation between people of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Media make a significant difference on the overall governance environment in which communities exist, create new societal norms that help maintain order, and develop constructive ways of managing conflict.

There are various sources of information and communication in Botswana. These include newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television, internet cafés, computers, faxes, radios, post offices, and transport and telecommunication infrastructure. The government-owned Botswana Daily News and privately owned Mmegi/The Reporter newspapers are published daily in English and Setswana. There are also numerous privately owned weeklies, such as the Mid-Week Sun, the Gazette and Morongwa. But the distribution of these newspapers is limited to urban centres and primary and secondary villages, where transport infrastructure is developed. In remote rural villages such as Gudigwa, printed media is not available. Availability is biased more toward the eastern region of the country where there are far more paved roads, power grids and telephone interchanges than in the western parts of the country.

The Department of Information and Broadcasting is one of the key institutions in the national strategic framework for HIV/AIDS. It is responsible for behavioural change communication through broadcasting HIV/AIDS-specific programmes. The government-owned Radio Botswana (RB1 and RB2), Botswana Television (Btv), and privately owned Gabs FM and Yarona FM transmit in Setswana and English. Again there is a problem of coverage in rural areas due to transmission and power problems. Only RB1 broadcasting services reach remote villages such as Gudigwa and Seronga, and only those households with a working radio and dry-cell batteries are able to benefit from these services. Ngamiland has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the country, therefore inadequate access to HIV/AIDS information adversely impacts on livelihoods in the district. In Seronga and Gudigwa there are no power lines, and the communities are therefore unable to access electricity-driven services, except for those who can afford to buy a generator. In Seronga, the VDC provides postal services.

In the research areas, Maun, as the district headquarters, is well endowed with transport infrastructure. The Transport Office in Maun indicates that there are approximately 60 taxis and 126 mini-buses providing internal public transport. In addition, at least 32 long-distance buses connect the village with other districts; there is an airport; about 5,217 private telephone connections; and access to both government and private newspapers. There is also a post office, several internet cafés and public telephones, and thousands of cellphone users. Gumare has at least three mini-buses, Sehitwa and Shorobe two, whereas Seronga and Gudigwa have none to date. Residents of Seronga make do with hitch-hiking for rides from private and government vehicles (especially ambulances from the clinics). But most importantly, the Okavango Community Trust (OCT) vehicles have become one of the major sources of transport at Gudigwa and Seronga. The Trust also uses radio

communications. Etsha 6 benefits from the long-distance bus services that connect the village of Shakawe to Maun; Etsha 6 and Sehitwa have three long-distance buses each, whereas Gumare has eight. Shorobe and Gudigwa have no telephone lines, whereas Seronga does and has recently had a cellular telephone network installed.

During focus group discussions, VDCs in Sehitwa and Seronga claimed that they had to put pressure on Botswana Telecommunication Corporation (BTC) to install public telephones at the kgotla and in other strategic locations in the villages. VDCs also submit requests to the District Development Plan for telephone lines in their village. VDCs in Maun and Gumare generally do less work in this regard, and leave it to individuals to apply for the service with BTC. Focus groups also indicated that villagers present their transport needs to VDCs, and these are then submitted to the Council Transport Division. In Sehitwa, a request was successfully made and a bus was assigned to the Sehitwa-Maun route; the VDC built a bus shelter for it. In Gudigwa, the VDC also requested a bus line be introduced. The request was granted, and the community provided accommodation for the driver. The bus service was, however, short lived due to bad roads. The Gudigwa VDC then negotiated with OCT to provide transport for goods in bulk, and different rates were negotiated to Maun, Gumare and Shakawe.

4.3. Summary

The quality of good governance should not only focus on accountability, democracy and transparency, but also on concrete development outcomes, in particular on aspects which facilitate and improve rural livelihoods and poverty alleviation.

A VDC has no statutory mandate to allocate natural resources (water, land, forest, wildlife, fauna and flora). VDCs need to work with or through departments (such as the Tawana Land board, Agricultural Resources Board, Department of Water Affairs and so on) to influence natural resource allocations. However, some community based natural resource management (CBNRM) constitutions in Ngamiland provide either for the VDC chair-person and secretary, or the entire VDC, to be ex officio members of their Village Trust Committees (VTCs) or Boards of Trustees. The brokerage role is likely to differ between VDCs in rural and remote areas and those located in urban villages. VDCs in the former have to work harder to facilitate access to basic services.

Water is a scarce resource in Botswana, and the state is responsible for its allocation. The issuing of water use rights is the responsibility of the Water Apportionment Board. There are several sources of water for communities in Ngamiland. These are piped outdoor standpipes, piped indoor, communal taps, bowser/tanker, well, borehole, river/stream, dam/pan, rainwater tank and spring. As in other parts of rural Botswana, the people of Ngamiland also depend on ground-water sources. VDCs play an indirect advocacy role, which includes approaching the District Council Water Unit to request for the installation of standpipes in various strategic parts of the village in order to maximise access, or to re-open standpipes which have been cut off without consulting village residents.

With regard to access to land, as a general practice the Subordinate Land Board does not consult village level committees on the allocation of residential or farming plots on communal land. VDC members apply for residential plots like everyone else and go through designated land over-seers. As a collective, however, VDCs apply for land for its community projects, and these are generally approved.

Some VDCs participate actively in controlling forest and bush fires. They are most likely to receive “intelligence” information about those who cause fires, especially if these are village residents. This information is passed to the Botswana Local Police for further investigation. VDCs hold kgotla meetings where discussions are held about preventing forest fires and decisions are made on the appropriate time for harvesting grass and reeds, and on the prevention of their over-harvesting.

The Government of Botswana follows a Primary Health Care (PHC) strategy to provide public health services. Emphasis is on the affordability and accessibility of medical services offered by a very elaborate primary health care system. The National Settlement Policy forms the basis of the PHC strategy and criteria for the five tiers of public health facilities. Access to health in the study areas conforms to the above five-tier service provision hierarchy. VDCs have lobbied for, and have been instrumental in, the provision of health posts (low level tier) as well as the upgrading of a health facility from one level to another (such as from a mobile stop to a health post, or from a clinic without to a clinic with maternity). There is very little contact with VDCs in assessing and delivering home-based services (e.g the care food basket), which is done either by social workers or home-based care nurses from the district council.

Although the Government of Botswana has expanded people’s access to social services by stepping up investment spending, the incidence of poverty in Botswana is still high, and there is a need to protect and provide for vulnerable social groups such as the elderly, disadvantaged children, the disabled and chronically ill. The Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons (2002) is the most relevant policy to VDC resource mediation and advocacy functions. Generally, VDCs have a long history of working with social workers to help identify and facilitate the registration of destitute persons.

VDCs are also proactive with regard to orphans. As adult mortality rates increase due to the AIDS pandemic, so does the possibility of the social displacement of surviving dependents (especially children) from established family relations. VDCs use their knowledge to identify, and refer to social workers, households that have unregistered orphans or whose caregivers are reluctant to have them registered (out of fear of stigmatisation). Social workers do the assessment. Some VDCs also supervise the delivery of the orphan food basket by designated suppliers.

There has been a rapid reduction of the percentage of people who have never been to school due to the phenomenal expansion of education infrastructure in Botswana since Independence. The Revised National Policy on Education (1994) provides for universal access to education and for vocational training. VDCs have been in the forefront of facilitating access to education, in particular primary and early childhood education. There are indications that some VDCs are beginning to be aware of the need to facilitate the provision of education for children with disabilities as well as adult education to enhance functional literacy in their respective communities. Access to non-formal education in Ngamiland, where it is needed most, is still constrained.

Media institutions and organisations have a significant impact on community life through the links they can provide and opportunities they can create. The availability of mass media ruptures physical and non-physical barriers and promotes cooperation between people of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Some VDCs claimed that they had to put pressure on the Botswana Telecommunication Corporation (BTC) to install public telephones at the kgotla and in other strategic locations in their villages.

Chapter 5 - Village Parliament Institutional Relations

Especially in rural and remote areas, the VDCs in Ngamiland tend to be multipurpose and flexible institutions adapting to the emerging demands of a changing society. VDCs therefore cannot address the resource and service needs of their communities single-handedly. The extent to which they are able to advocate resource access effectively depends on the existence of other supportive or complementary systems. Supportive relations could be found between VDCs and other village-level institutions, and between VDCs and district-level institutions. There are inherent trade-offs in both levels of institutional relations. In some relations (such as democratised relations), a win-win situation (or consensus and compromise) constitutes the ultimate outcome. In other relations, the end result is a win-lose situation, customarily in asymmetrical institutional relations. Services and resources may be accessible, but social processes to acquire them could either be rated as unsatisfactory, substandard or unreliable. Poor institutional relations between VDCs and other institutions (local or central government) breed general distrust. This chapter examines some of these intricacies.

5.1. VDC and District: Schizophrenic Relations

In the minds of its members, the VDC is the main village development institution. They regard the institution as a village parliament. This implies that, although the kgotla may be regarded as the traditional parliament with the chief as the ‘Speaker’, the VDC is a ‘modern’ village parliament which has two lines of accountability. Firstly, members are answerable to the traditional chief on a daily basis. Secondly, VDCs are accountable to the District Council either indirectly by official invitation or directly through the Community Development Officer (CDO) in the Department of Social and Community Development (S & CD), either in Maun or Gumare. The CDO is also an *ex officio* member of the VDC executive and its official supervisor. Official invitations to the district council in practice are rare because VDCs are represented by an elected counsellor who attends and presents VDC concerns and issues during district council resource allocation and planning deliberations. Overall, the institutional relations between VDCs and district councils are a bit muddled and loyalties divided. It is therefore not surprising that these relations may be ambiguous.

Focus group discussions suggest that, generally, the level of support acknowledged by VDCs between themselves and district-level institutions, in particular the District Extension Team (DET) and Social and Community Development Department (S & CD), is mixed. Some VDCs have a close working relationship with their social workers in S & CD. Other VDC chairpersons have been able to skilfully develop an affinity with specific key officers, and subsequently they are able to lobby effectively to have their work done. For instance, in Sehitwa one charismatic elderly woman, who has been with the VDC since the 1980s, has been able to effectively push the agenda of the Sehitwa VDC with the Council. She claims that one of her achievements was the provision of a mobile clinic and a bus service to Phathana, a cattle-post locality. It would not be surprising if her next agenda item would be to have the Council provide access to educational and health services; should that happen, her constituency could stop going to Sehitwa in order to access these services. This is also a good example of the “villagisation” of cattle posts as well as a very good example of

how ordinary citizens ‘bring development’ to the people (instead of the other way around) by democratising the development process.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, some older members of the VDC in Gudigwa are also in the Board of Trustees of the Bukhakwe Cultural Association, and are skilled negotiators with respect to access to key natural resources and services such as land for farming, grazing or commercial ventures. It is not surprising that the VDC rate their relationship with the Councillors highly. The VDC hold them socially accountable to their constituency. In this case the relationship is more active, and both parties see the relationship as mutually beneficial (a win-win scenario) (Table 14). Gudigwa, Seronga and Sehitwa rated institutional relations with the district council as “high.”

Kubung, Matlapana and Gumare rated their relations with the district council as “low.” Those councillors who have been rated low are perceived to be opportunistic, self-serving and disingenuous in pledging their commitment to community concerns. Indicators of a lack of commitment are said to include repeated absences, intellectual piracy (claiming ownership of VDC knowledge and ideas without due acknowledgements), and treating VDCs and the community as latent “vote banks” to be conveniently mobilised as a stepping stone to higher political office.

The Land Board was rated low because of a lack of consultation and transparency, and for poor relations with the chiefs, who are viewed culturally as legitimate custodians of land. Communities have a love/hate relationship with Land Board officers, who are regarded as a necessary evil that people have to learn to live with. When push comes to shove, the community loses when their aspirations are quashed by top-down land allocation procedures. Only the Gudigwa and Sehitwa VDCs seem to have a positive relationship with Land Board officers; this is not so in Seronga and Gumare, and - worse still - Kubung and Matlapana had nothing positive worth mentioning (Table 14). The relations appear to be adversarial and unproductive.

Table 14. VDC rating of relationship with district level institutions.

Level of Support	Kubung	Matlapana	Sehitwa	Gumare	Gudigwa	Seronga
District Councillor	Low	Low	High	Low	High	High
Sub-Land Board Office	None	None	Medium	Low	High	Low

5.2. VDCs and NGOs

5.2.1. NGO Relations

Part of the low support rating of district-level government institutions is due to the fact that most planning officers are office-bound in Maun or Gumare, and their visits to their outstations are infrequent. They are therefore less likely to be knowledgeable about (or grasp deeply) everyday village aspirations and priorities. District development administrative infrastructure faces dismal human resource constraints: it takes their officers long to respond to community demands, especially those covered by various government programmes. Because district institutions have implementation problems, some programme implementation could be delegated to NGOs or private sector institutions. All things being equal, some NGOs are generally good at assisting communities. But long-term government-NGO partnership is possible only if the government changes its unreceptive attitude toward the NGO sector, from tending to perceive it as a counter

force to a development partner. However, some supportive relations do exist, such as those between the Kalahari Conservation Society (KCS) and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP). Sometimes the confrontational approach of NGOs (such as Survival International) in dealing with sensitive matters makes government departments either ignore the issue or maintain an outright hostile stance. It is not surprising that VDCs (with the exception of Gudigwa) did not identify NGOs as the most important institutions in their villages (Table 15). In Gudigwa, Conservation International was the most active in promoting cultural tourism, while in Gumare, ACCORD was acknowledged for having organised skills training workshops. The institutional relations, however, appear to be very fragile, and may collapse or change at any time soon.

VDCs have limited (if any) working relations with NGOs and the private sector. Private sector institutions tend to serve upper- and middle-income groups, which themselves tend to be upwardly mobile. Generally, NGOs often have limited funding and their presence is scattered. NGOs in Botswana are heavily concentrated in the urban centres and cover tertiary settlements along the railway line or where good tarred roads have been provided. For instance, although Ngamiland District is one of the most hard hit by HIV/AIDS, AIDS service NGOs are concentrated in urban centres and along the eastern part of the country. VDCs are trying to establish HIV/AIDS counselling centres in their villages, but competition for resources means that they are often outdone by primary and secondary settlements where there are more people. VDCs therefore marginally work with the Village Extension Teams (VETs), Village Health Committees (VHCs), and established health facilities.

Table 15. The most important village-level institutions.

Institution	Kubung	Matlapana	Sehitwa	Gumare	Gudigwa	Seronga
Village Extension Team			x		x	
Village Trust Committee					x	x
Farmer Associations		x	x			
Community Home Based Care		x				
NGOs					x	
Youth Clubs		x			x	
Village Health Committee	x	x		x	x	x
Parent Teacher Association			x		x	x
YWCA/BCC		x	x	x		
Crime Prevention	x	x	x	x	x	x
Independence Committee			x		x	
Water Committee	x	x				

5.2.2. VDCs, Partisan Politics and CBOs

VDCs shy away from openly expressing divisive partisan politics. This does not mean that their members are apolitical. On the contrary, some VDC members in Seronga are the first to admit that they are cardholders of various political parties. They take it as given that VDC members have different political party affiliation, but as one member put it during a focus group discussion, “a VDC is no Freedom Square, no one is coming here to influence anyone’s political inclination.” In

Gudigwa, the VDC vowed to “stop partisan politics in its tracks” including “anyone who brings divisive ideas regardless of the source”. In Gumare, a highly politicised Kamanakao constituency, VDC members work to “keep politics out of VDC affairs”. In Maun and Sehitwa, VDCs want to stay clear of partisan politics in their deliberations and focus on addressing development issues.

Although VDCs acknowledge their political inclinations and that partisan politics in their midst would detour the VDC development mandate, they also contend that what the individual members do outside the VDC forum is their own business.

There has been a proliferation of formal and informal village-level institutions in Botswana over the past three decades. The density of these institutions varies according to a locality – rural/ remote vis-à-vis urban-village centres. A significant proportion of VDC members are also active members of other formal and informal village-level institutions that focus on cultural or social welfare issues. Some are ordinary members, whereas others hold positions of responsibility as chairpersons or secretaries in various committees. Individual structured interviews indicate that the majority (91%, N = 45) of VDC members participate in community organisations. These include cultural organisations, such as Kamanakao in Gumare, Mbongu-wa-Kathimana in Sehitwa and Bukhakwe Cultural Association in Gudigwa. There are also faith-based organisations, women’s affairs and natural resources management CBOs, football clubs and community choirs. Other village-level institutions that members participate in include village health teams, parent-teacher associations, and community home based care for terminally ill persons. Evidence of the existence of active participation in informal networks therefore suggests that VDCs are not isolated entities, but rather they are immersed in the everyday associational life of their respective communities. More research is needed to establish the extent to which the density of civic association (social capital) influences the overall performance of VDCs.

5.2.3. VDCs’ Relations with Village-Level Institutions

Although there is a plethora of formal and informal village-level institutions, not all are of equal value to VDCs. During focus groups, members were asked to identify the most important community-level institutions and explain their importance. For the VDCs, the Crime Prevention Committee, Village Health Team (VHT), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and the traditional women’s organisations - the Botswana Christian Council (BCC) and Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), are the most important. Again the value that VDCs attach to access to education and health is underlined here. BCC and YWCA branches in the villages are two of the oldest women’s NGOs in the country. The provision of guest houses for visitors from outside the village, and of day-care centres, appears to be a very important service rendered by these institutions.

With increasing unemployment and a relative increase in crime, concern about personal and public safety and the protection of property is an emerging area in which VDC members are actively involved in a partnership between community members and law enforcement institutions. In Gudigwa, informal interviews with tribal police officers suggested collaboration between the VDC, chiefs and tribal police resulted in a dramatic elimination of inter-clan fights, and a low tolerance for alcoholism and noise. Village extension services (literacy, forestry, Livestock Assistants, Agricultural Demonstrators, Problem Animal Control (PAC), Family Welfare Educators (FWEs) and Community Development Officers (CDOs)), although they exist in the villages, did not appear to be readily accessible. Their services have been acknowledged in Sehitwa and Gudigwa. One

would have expected, for instance, the PAC to be prominent in Seronga since the Department of Wildlife and National Parks has an office there. In Gudigwa, access to veterinary services is acknowledged. In Maun, water committees have been set up, and they work with VDCs to help maintain standpipes, or distribute water through bowsers where there is a shortage (Table 15). As already indicated in the previous subsection, NGO gap-filling outreach programme have had little impact on community well-being in Ngamiland.

VDC members were asked in focus groups to rate the level of support they receive from the same institutions they had identified as most important (Table 16). The VET is rated as highly supportive in Seronga and Sehitwa compared to Kubung in Maun. Likewise crime prevention and Independence committees are also ranked as highly supportive of the VDCs in some villages. With increased incidents of victimisation (murder, theft, assault, etc.) in the villages, VDCs are concerned about public safety issues. Some village-level institutions that were not rated as the most important none the less provide task-specific support to VDCs, such as suppliers of orphan care food baskets in Sehitwa, Gumare, Gudigwa and Seronga. VDCs continue their relationship with orphans in that they do not just identify them and get them registered by social workers, they also supervise the distribution of food and ensure that it gets to those who need it. Although education (PTA) and health (VHT) service delivery systems (rated low/medium support) tend to keep VDCs at arms length, most of them rely on VDC houses for accommodation, often failing to pay rent on time. In this scenario, although VDCs incur financial losses, they are more interested in attracting and retaining skilled personnel in rural areas. They tend to lose if they pressurise these systems to honour landlord-tenant business - this is a win-lose situation. Crime prevention in the context of public safety, however, benefits all stakeholders (Table 16).

Table 16. VDC rating of support received from village level institutions.

Institution	Kubung	Matlapana	Sehitwa	Gumare	Gudigwa	Seronga
Village Extension Team	Low	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	High
Village Trust Committee	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	High	High
Farmers group	N/A	Low	None	N/A	N/A	Low
Community Home Based care	None	None	Low	High	High	Low
NGOs	None	Low	Low	None	High (ACORD)	High (ACORD)
Youth Clubs	None	None	Medium	None	None	Low
PTA (Primary)	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Village Health Committee	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Medium
Crime Prevention	High	High	Medium	High	N/A	N/A
Independence Committee	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Water Committee	High	High	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

N/A: Not applicable.

5.2.4. The Chief and the Kgotla

5.2.4.1. Traditional Rulers - Chiefs

According to the Chieftainship Act of 1987, a chief is “an individual who (a) has been designated as a Chief (kgosi) in accordance with customary law by his ethnic assembled in the kgotla; and (b) has been recognised as a Chief by the Minister” (Botswana Government, 1987). There are various ranks of chiefs (dikgosi). The Chief who is the head of the district and is based in the district capital is most senior. S/he is assisted by Deputy Chiefs. Below the Deputy Chief rank is the Senior Chief Representative, who may assist the Deputy Chief in the District Capital or be in charge of the tribal administration in a large village, assisted by the Chief representatives, headmen of record, and headmen of arbitration (Botswana Government, 1999). Although chiefs are still selected from the royal families, government has control over the recognition and removal of traditional leaders of all ranks (Gillet, 1975:105). The system does not reflect an indigenous style of governance, but rather a hybrid western democratic system. According to Viveló (1977), Herero chief (omuhona) appointment is increasingly determined by exogenous factors, such as a command of English and Standard Seven education. In Ngamiland, Chief Tawana II, who is based in Maun, is in charge of the tribal administration in Ngamiland District, and is assisted by Deputy Chief Mathiba. In Ngamiland, there are also 10 senior chief representatives, 10 chief representatives, 38 headmen of record, and 25 headmen of arbitration. Figure 4 below gives a pictorial presentation of the different kinds of chiefs in the district.

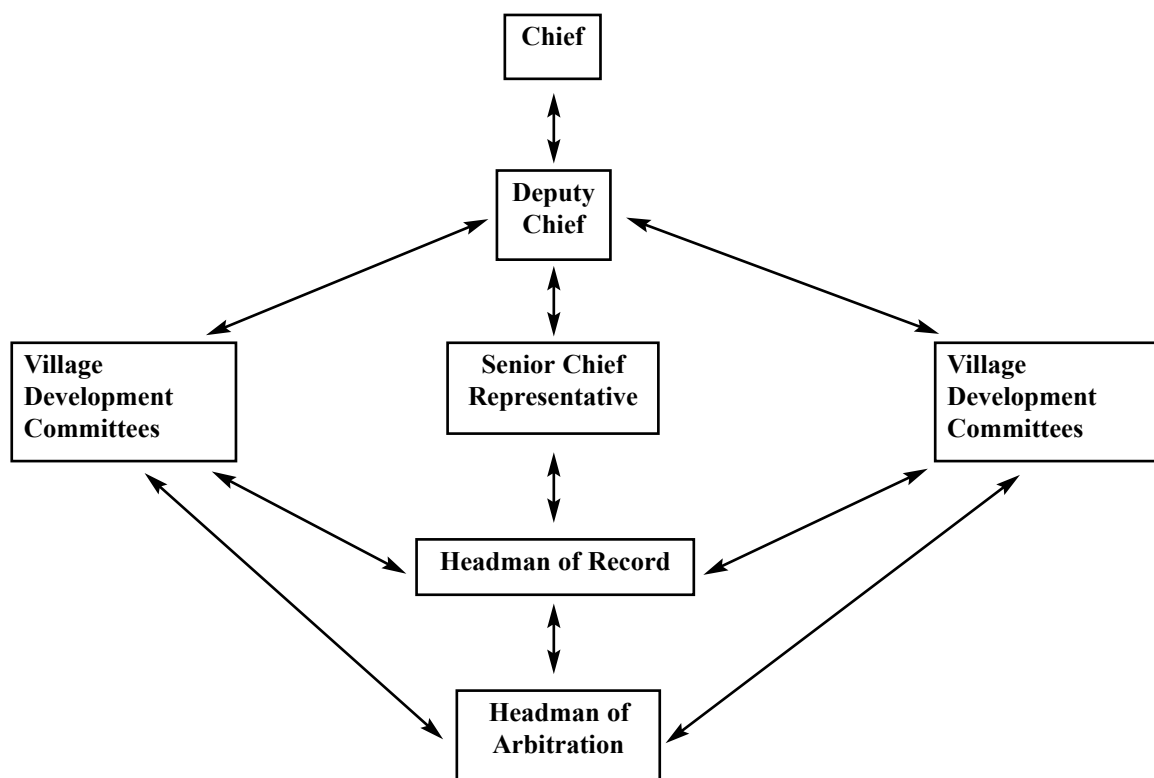


Figure 4. Structure of traditional leadership in Ngamiland District, Botswana (Adapted from Blaikie, Kgathi and Wilk, 2004).

5.2.4.2. VDCs and the Kgotla

Chiefs remain the ultimate symbols of identity and freedom in the context of a plural society in Botswana. Belonging to a given cultural community is an important indicator of citizenship (Nyamnjoh, 2003:244). Despite post-independence changes in the power of chiefs, they still remain a central vehicle for public input in democratising development as well as political processes.

In focus groups, VDCs were unanimous in their acknowledgement of the centrality of the kgotla in community life. The level of support between the kgotla and VDCs was highly rated (Table 17). VDCs hold the kgotla in high regard, and the chief consults them on development activities in the village. There are meetings that the chief calls independently of VDCs, and there are those that VDCs call on behalf of the community at the kgotla. If the VDC is regarded as a “village parliament”, then the kgotla becomes the open forum for public debate on a wide range of issues impacting on village life, including development interventions.

One view is that the VDC works under the kgotla - that is, it is not independent of the kgotla - although it may appear that the VDC is ‘above’ it. The VDC, however, cannot be ‘above’ or have higher authority than the kgotla because it is the kgotla that authorises and/or legitimises the formation of a VDC in the first instance. In small villages, the village headman may or may not be indebted to the VDC. In some cases, the VDC has facilitated the appointment of a headman by the Minister of Local Government. If the appointee is endorsed by the paramount chief of the area, and is inaugurated, then the chief in question could be indebted to the VDC. In some villages such as Seronga, the VDC mobilised community resources for the construction of the kgotla (physical structure) and the appointment of the village chief. Yet the people in Seronga argue that the kgotla comes first, and that it is larger than the community and its chief (Table 17).

Another view is that the VDC is ‘independent’ of the kgotla (Gumare, Gudigwa, partially Seronga and Sehitwa). VDCs respond directly to community grievances and the kgotla is the forum they use. The kgotla was made possible by the VDC and the VDC may act on the chief's behalf (Table 17). The chief supports VDC decisions and does not oppose them. In Gudigwa, the VDC asked the government to let people elect their own chief, and the request was granted. The kgotla legitimises the VDC and endorses its decisions, and the chief is less likely to oppose its decisions and development plans. It is the VDC that developed most of the infrastructure (leobo, public toilets, standpipes, kgotla kraal and cattle crusher) in the village.

Table 17. VDC relationship with the kgotla.

Kgotla	Kubung	Matlapana	Sehitwa	Gumare	Gudigwa	Seronga
Level of Support	High	Medium	High	High	High	High
VDC Sub-Committee of Kgotla	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
VDC Independent	No	No	No/Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes/No

To a large extent, some chiefs are indebted to their VDCs, which worked hard to have them inaugurated, their profile raised, and their legitimacy affirmed in village politics. Clearly from the above discussion there are differences of perception regarding whether VDCs are independent or subordinate entities of the kgotla. Part of this ambiguity emanates from the fact that, although the kgotla has information dissemination resources, it is a public commodity with numerous competing

stakeholders who have different social and political powers. Also, the Department of Social and Community Development (S & CD) in the district council helps VDCs identify community projects and apply for government grants. Debates, prioritisation and endorsement of these community projects take place at the kgotla. This further complicates matters especially when some VDCs begin to see themselves not as a sub-committee of the kgotla, but of the S & CD. This ambiguity is also partly due to the fact that there are different levels of chiefs who have different levels of authority over the village/s under their jurisdiction, and can only be removed from office by the Ministry of Local Government.

The above differences notwithstanding, all VDCs in the study areas have called a kgotla meeting for one reason or another. The chiefs do not chair all VDC meetings at the kgotla, rather who chairs depends on the purpose of the meeting. The chairperson of the VDC could chair meetings discussing the following issues: hand-over and financial report at the end of VDC term of office; cleaning of the village; crime prevention; drought relief employment; visits of government extension officers; and discussions of a proposed project. Other issues, such as problems of illegal immigrants, and national events such as the Vision 2016 Week, Independence, President’s Day, and World Tourism Day, are usually chaired by the chief. There is some division of labour, and the VDCs strive for a win-win situation. Table 17 gives a summary of perceived working relations between VDCs and dikgotla as measured by whether the interaction is high, medium or low.

5.3. Democracy at the Kgotla?

5.3.1. Secret Ballot vs Open Kgotla Elections

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some VDCs in Ngamiland elected new members through the open kgotla systems, while others have introduced the secret ballot. VDCs agree that the open

Table 18. Advantages and disadvantages of kgotla voting.

Kgotla Open Ballot - Advantages	Kgotla Open Ballot - Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone at the kgotla participates • The nominee may not have prior knowledge that s/he will stand and have no time to “sell” themselves or influence the voting • Voters refuse to elect incompetent persons to office • There is an opportunity to vote for the best person who is capable for the job • Transparent system • Dialogue – encourages people to justify their nomination • Support once endorsed publicly is likely to be sustained • VDC gains community legitimacy, no one can claim that they do not know who VDC members are since there has been a public endorsement • Both official and popular criteria are used to determine eligibility • Clearly laid out criteria for eligibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be divisive, breed animosity, jealousy and conflict between friends and family members, and promote factionalism • Voters feel constrained and intimidated when publicly going against individuals • Threat and fear of isolation, so people will vote for a person in order to maintain social relations • Individual eligibility is assessed by social worker, not the people

Table 19. Secret ballots.

Secret Ballot - Advantages	Secret Ballot - Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidential • No intimidation and undue pressure when making a decision • Less conflict ridden • Freedom of choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that promises to voters can be fulfilled • Need to canvas for support – calls for time and resources • Open to manipulation by voters from outside the village • Can encourage nepotism yet relatives may be incompetent • Fewer obligations to be accountable since there is less connection between the person voted in and the voters • Likely to politicise VDCs and exacerbate partisan politics since candidates have to campaign like politicians

kgotla system has its advantages and disadvantages. Table 18 below gives a summary from focus group discussions. The secret ballot box was also seen as having some advantages and disadvantages. Table 19 gives a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of secret voting.

5.3.2. VDC and Leadership Development

Given the potential for conflict arising from different sources, be it partisan politics, ethnicity or gender differences, the VDCs contend that what is most important is to maintain development focus and provide “exemplary community leadership” by rising above divisiveness. The elements of “exemplary leadership” include but are not limited to the following:

- *A visionary, transparent and honest broker*
VDC members must work diligently and without favour. In Gudigwa, for example, the VDC argues that it provided the focus and vision for the future of the village. To date the Gudigwa VDC claims to be responsible and transparent. Residents remain informed about VDC activities, both on-going and planned.
- *On-going skills development*
The Seronga VDC encourages members of the VDC and the village to participate in training courses organised by NGOs and the S & CD. So far four villagers have agreed to go for a course to learn sculpting/carving and dress making. Skills development can create much-needed jobs in the community.
- *Accountability and industriousness*
VDCs must account for the funds they are granted by government. As one respondent put it, “the fact that we have survived this long with so little implies that we are industrious and maximise the opportunities and resources at our disposal.” Giving progress reports at the kgotla about projects builds trust and confidence.
- *Ability to mobilise internal community resources (money and voluntary labour)*
VDCs should not just depend on government grants. They should also be able to mobilise voluntary and monetary contributions within their village.

- *Participation in organised civic activities*
Exemplary leadership is demonstrated by taking up leadership positions, for example as chairpersons or secretaries of the water committee, day care, anti-crime or Independence celebration committees.
- *Adopting best practices*
These include responding quickly and positively to new opportunities, committing time and resources to new ventures, identifying and implementing local solutions to local problems, and being responsive to the needs of others such as destitute persons and orphans.
- *Conflict resolution*
Actively encouraging others to work towards collaborative problem solving. In some villages, the VDC chairperson may act on behalf of the chief.

Given these ideals or demonstrable “exemplary leadership” qualities, how do VDCs compare with the community’s trust? The section below explores this question.

5.4. VDCs and Community Trust

Levels of trust and reciprocity are important elements that influence the performance of VDC in villages. When asked whether or not VDCs trust their constituencies, that is the villagers, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Cited indicators of trustworthiness included the fact that Sexaxa (an associated locality) and Matlapana (the “parent” VDC) communities work together for common goals which is an indication of trust between residents of the two localities and the VDC. The fact that some members of the VDC have been re-elected also indicates that there is a spirit of goodwill.

In Seronga, the fact that villagers are often concerned about the well-being of VDC members is a sign that the VDC matters in community life. Also, the fact that VDC elections are evaluated as very fair and without conflict is another sign that villagers believe in the system. In Gudigwa, the VDC was mistrusted during the initial settlement days, because of prevailing intra-clan conflict. However, the VDC helped residents settle when they were going through a difficult period by playing honest brokers and negotiating peaceful and orderly life. Gudigwa residents now believe that the VDC has their best interests at heart and does not work for any particular clan. In Gumare, trust between the VDC and residents is demonstrated by the fact that once consensus is reached and a decision is made, residents support implementation and do not disown it along the way. Residents also do not blame the VDC for all the ills of the village. They also see the VDC as an honest broker and reliable mediator between them and the government. Prior to official government visits, the VDC calls a kgotla meeting for villagers to discuss issues to be presented during the visit. The VDC then presents a collective voice of the villagers to the government, and so far there have not been complaints of misrepresentation.

When asked whether politicians and local elites take advantage of VDCs, the response was negative, with a caveat that there might be a few bad apples, for instance unscrupulous councillors who want to push their political agenda. But usually the VDC stands firm on their positions and the district council has no choice but to present what has been decided upon by the VDC. Also, ex officio members may attempt to undermine the integrity of the VDC. Doing so, however, may lead VDC incumbents to expose their weaknesses during kgotla meetings. This possibility, it is argued,

serves as a deterrent, since public embarrassment may ensue once everything is brought into the open.

5.5. Summary

VDCs in Ngamiland, especially in rural and remote areas, tend to be multipurpose and flexible institutions adapting to the emerging demands/issues of a society in transition. The extent to which they are able to advocate resource access effectively depends on the existence of other supportive and/or complementary resource systems. Supportive relations could be found between VDCs and other village-level institutions, and between VDCs and district-level institutions. There are inherent trade-offs in both levels of institutional relations. VDC members generally rate institutional relations as either low or high depending on how important the institution in question is perceived to be accountable, committed and actively supportive of VDCs attempts to address community concerns. Poor or unsupportive institutional relations breed general distrust between VDCs and agencies that mediate access to resources/services. This chapter has examined some of these intricacies.

Overall, the institutional relations between VDCs and the district council are a bit muddled and loyalties divided. It is therefore not surprising that institutional relations may be ambiguous. Claims of support between VDCs and district-level institutions, in particular the District Extension Team (DET) and Social and Community Development Department (S & CD) are mixed. Some VDCs have a closer working relationship with their social workers in S & CD than others. Relations between VDCs and councillors range from low to high level support. Those councillors whose level of support have been rated low are perceived as opportunistic, self-serving and disingenuous in pledging their commitment to community concerns. The relationships are characterised by winners and losers. VDCs that rated their relationship with the councillor high perceived them as active and socially accountable. Both parties characterised the relationship as mutually beneficial (a win-win scenario). The relationship with the Land Board was rated low because the agency's a lack of consultation and transparency, and for its poor relations with the chiefs, who are viewed culturally as legitimate custodians of land.

District development administrative institutions face dismal human resource constraints. It takes their officers long to respond to community demands. Because these institutions have implementation problems, ideally some programme implementation could be outsourced to NGOs or to private sector institutions. But government tends to perceive them as a counter-force rather than as development partners. It is not surprising that VDCs, with the exception of Gudigwa, did not identify NGOs as the most important institutions in their villages. Although the district is hard hit by HIV/AIDS, AIDS services NGOs are concentrated in urban centres. VDCs are trying to open HIV/AIDS counselling centres in their villages, but competition for resources means that they are often outdone by primary and secondary settlements in the eastern part of the country where there are more people and better development infrastructure.

VDCs shy away from expressing openly divisive partisan politics. However, this does not mean that their members are apolitical. On the contrary, some VDC members are the first to admit that they are cardholders of political parties. Although VDCs acknowledge their political inclinations and that partisan politics in their midst would detour the VDC development mandate, they also contend that what the individual members have a right to associate freely outside the VDC forum.

A significant proportion of VDCs are also active members of other village formal- and informal-level institutions that focus on cultural or social welfare issues. Some are ordinary members, whereas others hold positions of responsibility as chairpersons or secretaries in various committees.

Although there is a plethora of formal and informal village-level institutions, not all are of equal value to VDCs. These include, but are not limited to, Crime Prevention Committees, Village Health Teams (VHT), Parent-Teacher Associations, traditional women's organisations (the Botswana Christian Council (BCC) and Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)), and village extension services (literacy, forestry, Livestock Assistants, Agricultural Demonstrators, Problem Animal Control (PAC)). Some institutions were rated as more important than others. Village level institutions, such as education (PTA) and health (VHT), tend to keep VDCs at arms length although most of them rely on VDC houses for accommodation.

VDCs were unanimous in their acknowledgement of the centrality of the kgotla in community life. VDCs hold the kgotla with high regard, and the chief consults them on development activities in the village. There are meetings that the chief calls independently of VDCs, and there are those that VDCs call on behalf of the community at the kgotla. If the VDC is regarded as a "village parliament" then the kgotla becomes the open forum for public debate.

One view is that the VDC works under the kgotla. Another view is that the VDC *is* above the kgotla. Given the above debate, there are differences regarding whether VDCs are independent entities or exist as a sub-committee of the kgotla. Part of this ambiguity emanates from the fact that the kgotla is a public commodity with numerous stakeholders who have different social and political power. The above differences notwithstanding, all VDCs in the study areas have called a kgotla meeting for one reason or another.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some VDCs in Ngamiland elected new members through the open kgotla system, while others have introduced secret ballots. VDCs agree that the open kgotla system has its advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages include the fact that everyone participates and the system is transparent. The disadvantages include the fact that the system can be divisive and breed animosity, jealousy and conflict between friends and family members, and promote factionalism. Conversely, the secret ballot box was also seen as having some advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include the fact that the system is not intimidating and thus does not create undue pressure when making a decision, and there is freedom of choice. The disadvantages include the need to canvas for support, and that the process demands time and resources (financial and human). The system is more likely to openly politicise VDCs and exacerbate partisan politics, since candidates have to campaign like politicians.

Levels of trust and reciprocity are important elements which influence the performance of VDCs. When asked whether or not VDCs trust their constituencies, that is the villagers, the response was overwhelmingly positive. When asked whether politicians and local elites are likely to take advantage of VDCs, the response was negative, with a caveat that there might be a few bad apples, for instance unscrupulous councillors who want to push their political agenda through VDCs. But usually the VDCs stand firm on their convictions.

Chapter 6 - VDCs, Development, Change and Resilience

6.1. VDCs, Development, Change and Resilience

As the oldest post-Independence village institutions, VDCs have changed (along lines of gender, age, ethnicity and locality) over time. In the 1970s, for instance, VDCs mobilised communal labour for the construction of schools, roads and houses. VDCs continue to play that role, but in the 1980s they added access to potable water, health, the preservation of cultural sites (such as burial grounds), early childhood education, the construction of storage facilities, as well as undertaking a range of income-generating projects (community gardens, poultry projects, the rental of facilities such as houses, butcheries, day-care centres and community halls). The 1990s were characterised by building traditional community assets, but also saw pressure being put on other public institutions for access to telecommunication infrastructure and energy resources (electricity or power generators). Since 2000, there has been both continuity and change. The list of activities includes the familiar (community halls, bus shelters, community gardens, bakery, postal agencies, infrastructure development of tribal administration (kgotla, shelters and cattle crushers), houses for teachers, nurses, government officials and the destitutes), and the new (installation of public telephone booths and the upgrading of health and educational facilities).

VDCs have a history of advocating for the redistribution of resources to vulnerable groups such as destitute persons, orphans, victims of disaster, and people with disabilities. VDCs are also active in natural resource conservation issues. An inventory of VDC assets includes houses, pre-schools, offices and business premises for rent, construction facilities (brick moulding machines), and catering (tables, chairs, large cooking pots, cutlery and so on).

6.2. Village Specific Development Decades

An analysis of VDC priorities in the research sites also demonstrates continuity and adaptability over the past three decades. Since most development projects were discussed at the kgotla, the definitions of development programmes were generally male-biased. VDC projects have focused on physical activities such as residential houses, kgotla shelters and storerooms. They also include the construction of schools and day-care centres. Table 20 shows the VDCs' development priorities over three decades in villages at Gudigwa, Seronga, Gumare, Sehitwa and Maun - Kubung and Matlapana.

Gudigwa village did not exist prior to 1970. The scattered clans joined together in the early 1980s as indicated in the introduction. However, focus groups there suggested that the VDC, together with strong community leadership, was one of the mobilising forces that convinced the dispersed Basarwa clans to settle permanently in one place, and the RAD Coordinator convinced them of the benefit of a permanent settlement, and put pressure on government to provide social services such as water, health, and education. These services were made available in the 1990s, and in 2000 the VDC concentrated on improving existing facilities and the provision of housing for extension staff. In 2003, at the time of the interviews, the VDC was constructing a storage facility for the health post and had plans for a community garden, public toilets, telephone lines and the tarring of the

Mohembo-Gudigwa road (which has been included in District Development Plan 6, including the construction of Mohembo Bridge).

In Seronga in the 1970s, the VDC focused on community mobilisation and fundraising (through metshelo, beer brewing and parties) in order to build a kgotla office and a primary school. In the 1980s funds were raised for a teacher's salary, in the 1990s the VDC constructed traditional houses to accommodate extension workers, and in 2000 electricity was provided to teachers' houses. At the time of the interview, plans for the future included the tarring of the Seronga-Mohembo road, and the provision of public toilets and a kgotla kraal (to keep stray or transient cattle).

In Sehitwa, the 1970s saw the construction of houses for primary school teachers, while the 1980s saw the continuation of houses for extension workers, the fencing of burial grounds and the gravelling of village roads. In the 1990, focus was on improving access to transport infrastructure with the provision of bus shelters, a VDC post office and the tarring of village roads. In 2000, a storeroom and a bus shelter at Pathane locality were built. Future plans of the Sehitwa VDC include the construction of a community hall and hiring a house manager.

In Gumare, the VDC's energy in the 1970s focused also on the construction of primary schools and roads, while in the 1980s, efforts were made to help relocate the village from the river and to develop infrastructure. The 1990s saw the construction of a day-care centre and a poultry farm. In 2000, water and health facilities were provided. The VDCs' future plans for Gumare include advocating for a senior secondary school, a bus rank, new burial grounds, a community garden, a wildlife office and a referral hospital.

Participation in VDCs is also related to the socio-economic conditions of a place, in particular whether the activities fit in with livelihood opportunities and vice-versa. Etsha 6 residents depend on labour-intensive dryland farming, fishing and hunting. Sometimes VDC activities coincided with both seasonal migrations. For Hambukushu, as an immigrant community of Etsha 6, the VDC became a catalyst for cultural integration into mainstream society through links with district and village extension workers, and for improved literacy and gender relations.

With regard to participation in decision-making, focus groups in all the research sites indicated that, before any project could be implemented in the village, there has to be a consensus first among members of the VDCs, after which the idea is then presented to the kgotla where it is debated at length by the people and the chief. The kgotla is thus larger than the sum of its parts as a forum for enabling people's (morafe) participation in decisions. Stakeholders in the process include VDCs, the chief, the people, community development and extension workers, and council representatives. VDCs give feedback to the community regarding project progress, both achievements and constraints, through the kgotla. As one respondent put it, all consultative meetings take place at the kgotla. The VDC comes up with development ideas, but they have to be endorsed at the kgotla by all stakeholders. The kgotla emerges as a forum for consensus-building through negotiations and dialogue (therisano).

Also, VDCs contend that with the introduction of the secret ballot voting system (as opposed to the open ballot at the kgotla) and canvassing of votes by potential candidates, partisan politics is likely to come to the forefront. The kgotla would no longer act as a buffer against a politically driven agenda, and partisan politics would in the final analysis impact negatively on VDC performance.

Table 20. Development and future plans.

Priority/Decade	Gudigwa	Seronga	Gumare	Sehitwa	Kubung	Matlapana
1970	Scattered clans in various localities	Fundraising - <i>metshelo</i> and beer brewing, mobilise labour for building <i>kgotla</i> office, primary school	Schools, roads and employment	Primary school Housing for teachers	Construction of houses	
1980	Mobilise, convince permanent settlement, and unify different Basarwa clans in Gudigwa Pressure government for social services (education, health, water)	Fundraising for primary school teacher's salary	Relocation of village from the river, infrastructure through <i>ipelegeng</i>	Housing for village extension workers, fencing burial site, gravelling village roads	Breaking away from Meno ward to Kubung, construction of houses for rental	Provision of primary school, clinic, a cooperative, gravelling roads, improvement of farming methods
1990	Primary school and health post established Drilling for sweet water	Construction of traditional houses to accommodate village extension workers	Construction of houses, a day-care centre and poultry farming	Bush shelters, VDC office, tar village roads	Construction of day-care centre and poultry farm	Provision of a cattle crusher, a headman, development of Sexaxa and Disaneng localities
2000	Improvement of existing facilities, additional classroom, connection of standpipes, clearing roads, provision of housing for extension staff	Provision of electricity Providing houses for primary school teachers	Provision of water, health facilities	Store room, bus shelter at Phathane	Construction of storeroom and chief's office, electrifying and fencing VDC houses	Community Hall, guest house, primary school for Sexaxa, renovate VDC houses, electricity and telephone to VDC and <i>kgotla</i> office, school for the disabled, preschool
2003 and future	Provision of public toilets, community vegetable garden, Hall, telephone lines and VDC and Chief's office Tarring of Mohembo - Gudigwa road	Tarring of Mohembo-Seronga road <i>kgotla</i> kraal and shelter, public toilets	Senior secondary school, additional primary schools, bus rank, new burial site, <i>kgotla</i> shelter and kraal, tarred roads and community vegetable garden, a referral hospital and wildlife office	Community Hall, hiring housing manager	Fencing <i>kgotla</i> with stones, build a house for destitute, bring electricity to the ward	Fence and gravel, burial grounds, tar main roads around <i>kgotla</i> and gravelling of Disaneng road, train VDC members, advocate for long office terms, upgrade health post to clinic and have more nurses

6.3. Participatory District Development Planning

At the district level the most significant development institution is the District Development Committee (DDC), which was established by a Presidential Directive in 1970. The DDC is chaired by the District Commissioner and is responsible for the coordination of development activities at district level. The DDC has a sub-committee, the District Extension Team (DET), comprising the Heads of Extension Departments at the district level. The DDC provides the DET with policy guidance and administrative support. The DET is responsible for the interpretation of development policies: it provides guidance to the Village Extension Teams (VET) and rural communities for the implementation of their programmes within such policies. DET membership is composed of more senior officers at the district headquarters than those at the sub-district level. VDCs work closely with, and coordinate the work of, VET and Village Health Committees (VHCs) as well as of some other non-governmental organisations. Members of the above-mentioned committees could also be members of VDCs.

The District Health Planning Committee (DHPC) has the primary responsibility for the health component of district plans. It is the focal point for discussion and decision-making in health matters at the district level. The DHPC receives progress reports from the District Medical Officer (DMO) on the implementation of the council's health and sanitation activities, and sets district health priorities for discussion at DDC and council level. The District Drought Relief Committee (DDRC) provides a forum for reporting on drought relief planning, implementation and monitoring of the District Drought Programme. The DDRC terms of reference include providing input into the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the District Drought Programme; assessing project proposals from village-level institutions (including VDCs) for inclusion in the labour-based relief projects, and recommending their approval to the District Development Committee; and preparing reports to be used in assessing drought conditions by a drought assessment inter-ministerial committee.

The District Development Plan is the main document for programme and policy implementation at district and local levels. The District Development Plan contains the proposed initiatives from the various government sectors, with each government department detailing its programmes. District plans and programmes are formulated and implemented in a given policy framework for purposes of addressing particular social and economic development concerns. VDCs are widely consulted regarding these plans and negotiate for key concerns from their communities to be included in the plans. All things being equal, district-wide village consultations are usually held six months prior to the drafting of the district plan. These are followed by the production of Local Authorities Key Issues Papers (LAKIPs), Ministerial Sectorial Key Issues Papers (SKIPs) and Macro-Economic Outlines for the National Development Plan taking into account policy issues, facts and figures outlined in the LAKIPs (Botswana Government, 1997:87, 446).

VDCs and dikgotla provide a forum for the articulation of village-level priorities, which are subsequently incorporated through a district planning system, ultimately filtering through to the overall National Development Plan (Wusch, 1998). Key issues for the North West District Development Programme 6 (2003-2009) include poverty, and unemployment, education and health (HIV/AIDS). Table 21 below gives a summary of the key issues.

During consultations for District Development Plan 6 (DDP 6) 2003/2009, the VDCs developed a long list of community needs. Major issues from consultations highlighted the need to increase access to HIV/AIDS services, employment opportunities, education facilities, staff housing,

Table 21. Key issues for the North West District Development Programme 6 (2003-2009).

Issue	Goal	Objective
Poverty and unemployment	Alleviation of poverty through the creation of employment opportunities	Facilitate the creation of community projects through the utilisation of government and other funding sources to undertake at least one income-generating project per village during the plan period
Education	To improve district literacy levels through the provision of necessary resources	To increase access to senior secondary education by the end of the plan period
HIV/AIDS	To reduce the rate of infection in the district through information, education and communication campaigns	To increase public awareness through education and kgotla meetings

transport (shortage of which negatively affects the productivity of extension officers), kgotla offices, the provision of more facilities to control littering and veld fires, improved water quality, physical infrastructure like roads, telephone and electricity, serviced land, and the resolution of land use conflicts. VDCs also called for the improvement of communication between implementers and communities. The DDP 6 development goals and objectives have been formulated on the basis of these key issues.

Issues related to HIV/AIDS concerns were apparent. The VDCs in Seronga, Etsha 6 and Sehitwa wanted HIV/AIDS Counselling and Information Centres to be established, and requested that more funding should be given to AIDS projects (Maun District Development Department, 2004). The finalised DDP reflects the incorporation of VDC input, including increasing public awareness of HIV/AIDS through education and kgotla meetings.

6.4. Constraints and Threats

The following were raised through focus group discussions as threats to the future of VDCs. These were based on practices that were more verifiable in some villages and less so in others, and VDCs are concerned that they may cripple the integrity of the “VDC movement”. These issues include but are not limited to:

- Embezzlement of VDC funds due to poor accounting and book-keeping procedures;
- Partisan political affiliations/political factionalism;
- Poor productivity among members;
- Poor remuneration;
- Lack of trust between VDCs and communities;
- Over-exploitation of VDCs by government departments for their own benefits;
- Inadequate government financial support or threats of withdrawing government funding of VDC projects;
- Termination of VDC sitting allowances;
- Conflict between government and VDCs regarding the ownership and control of VDC houses;
- Withdrawal of the chief’s support;
- Adverse influence of non-residents vis-à-vis residents in village politics; and

- Personal aggrandisement/self-serving agenda of individuals aspiring for high political office.

Community asset building was achieved in the face of objective constraints, such as inadequate financial support from government, mismanagement of internal and externally generated funds by some VDC members, unreliable disbursement of VDC sitting allowances, conflict between government and VDCs regarding ownership and control of VDC houses, collapse of the spirit of volunteerism, threats of partisan politics, and ethnicity.

6.5. VDC Physical vs Financial Capital

Since their establishment in the 1970s, VDCs have accumulated verifiable physical assets (community halls, gardens, income projects, postal offices, cattle crushers, day-care centres, etc. VDCs have been unable to use this capital to generate other forms of capital - especially financial (cash income, and savings and investments) from, for example, housing or equipment rentals. The VDC asset pentagon thus remains highly skewed, in part because of either embezzlement of funds/corruption due to poor accounting and book-keeping procedures or a lack of business management skills. Conflict between government and VDCs regarding ownership and control of VDC houses has also contributed to the institutions' inability to use its physical capital to generate financial capital.

6.6. VDC and District Development Plans

Is VDC development input more local and less national in orientation? To answer this pertinent question, it is important to examine how VDCs participate in the national development process and whether or not their input is reflected at various levels of development planning, from District Development Plans (DDPs) to National Development Plans (NDP). At the district level, the most significant development institution is the District Development Committee (DDC). The DDC has a sub-committee, the District Extension Team (DET). The DET provides guidance to Village Extension Teams (VET). VDCs work closely with, and coordinate the work of, the VET and Village Health Committees (VHCs).

Chapter 7 - Future Prospects, Challenges and Conclusion

7.1. Challenges

A VDC is the main village development institution in Botswana. VDC members regard it as a village parliament, and are answerable to the chief on a daily basis, and to the district council (specifically the Department of Social and Community Development) on official invitation. VDCs are subsets of the second rank of local institutions and the lowest level in the central government's development administration hierarchy, having been brought into existence through a Presidential Directive. A VDC is a non-statutory local community structure with the authority to implement government-sanctioned policies and programmes, and consisting of non-salaried members. Ngamiland has 55 functioning VDCs in gazetted villages. VDCs run their daily activities independently, and have much leeway in setting their development agenda. Eligible members should be able to read and write at least one official language (either English or Setswana).

An analysis of VDC membership profiles from individual interviews and focus groups suggest that they are ordinary Batswana in terms of socio-economic and educational attainment status. Although women form a majority in VDCs, males tend to be chairpersons while women control the VDC finances and manage the flow of information. While there have been changes in gender participation in favour of women, decision-making is reflected in cultural terms as a public domain of men, which means that women have to work harder to gain legitimacy as independent actors in their own right. VDCs as social institutions are structures of facilitation, which also constrains the agency of individuals and groups.

VDCs engender community processes, which, like any other social process, are characterised by conflict and co-operation as the rules of the game change. Sometimes VDCs win, other times they lose out. They collude and consent and use local discretion to accommodate local realities in order to optimise access to resources and services on behalf of communities. VDCs have lobbied for, and have been instrumental in the provision of, health posts, the upgrading of a health facility from one level to another (such as from a mobile stop to a health post, or from a clinic without to one with a maternity ward). VDCs also play a minor but important role in two programmes, the Orphan Care and the Community Home Based Care (CHBC) programmes provided for by the National Policy on HIV/AIDS. VDCs have been in the forefront of facilitating access to education, in particular primary and early childhood education.

The Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons (2002) is the most relevant policy to VDC resource mediation and advocacy functions. VDCs assist in identifying destitutes and recommending them for assessment and registration by social workers. Once registered, destitute are eligible for government assistance and services. Supportive relations between VDCs and other village-level institutions, and between VDCs and district-level institutions, could be found. In some relations (such as democratised relations), a win-win situation or one of consensus and compromise constitutes the ultimate outcome. In other relations, the end result is a win-lose situation, customarily in asymmetrical institutional relations. The level of support between district-level institutions, in particular the District Extension Team and Land Board, was rated low because of a

lack of consultation and transparency, and poor relations with the chiefs, who are viewed culturally as the legitimate custodians of land. VDCs hold the kgotla with high regard and the chiefs consult them on development activities in the village. All VDCs in the study areas have called a kgotla meeting for one reason or another.

Since Independence, the Government of Botswana formally adopted both traditional (kgotla system) and non-traditional institutions, such as VDCs, VETs, VHCs and other modern district-level structures as a strategy for democratic decentralisation in order to promote participatory development planning and administration. Ideological reasons notwithstanding, the government opened up official spaces for bottom-up planning, as well as mechanism for linking government and local people. Although non-statutory in character, VDCs are authorised instruments in Botswana that accord ordinary Botswana social and political rights (the freedom of speech, association, thought and movement, among others). The structure and processes of government, which nurture the sanctity and rule of law, are expected to lead to the development of permanent institutions and traditions for ensuring the same democratic structures and processes. Clearly, in Botswana there is a pragmatic alliance between traditional social and political structures (kgotla) and VDCs in the adoption of community-driven policies and programmes. These invisible coalitions constitute micro-practices that provide a strong foundation for modern liberal democracy in Botswana.

The extent to which VDCs provide the basis for the effective implementation of social policies and programmes, and consolidate democracy in Botswana, remains open-ended. However, the findings seem to suggest that the activities of VDCs and other village-level institutions provide a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for bringing together divergent societal groups and interests (embedded in gender, age, ethnicity and so on). In these officially sanctioned spaces, VDCs re-write the official script within limits of acceptable change, and deploy consensus-building strategies to harmonise competing and conflicting interests through negotiation, accommodation and compromise. Rather than becoming gullible dupes of central government policies and programmes, VDCs have demonstrated agency, innovation, negotiation, resilience and adaptability. The central function of the VDC is to use collective power to put a check on district and central government officials. In other words, these groups provide oversight to help ensure that the government operates within the parameters set by a democratic constitution.

VDCs should be given statutory power to initiate, prioritise, coordinate and implement community-based projects since they are at the centre, rather than the invisible margins, of community development. Statutory power would allow the VDCs more autonomy, flexibility and initiative to formulate workable policy and programme input that reflect the aspirations of their constituencies. Without such measures, the creation of decentralised structures alone will at best create marginal change, and at worst generate further frustration, not only within the community but also among village extension workers who are charged with empowering local communities.

VDCs are critical elements of Botswana's democracy and good governance. They provide the Botswana government, for example, with a basis upon which social policies are conceived, articulated and, most importantly, implemented. However, they are prone to being service-oriented and relegated to secondary status in the society. As a result, residents often see them as working or pursuing government's agenda given that they perform several tasks, such as overseeing its public works operations, implementing the Destitute Policy, etc. They contribute to a certain democratic

quality, as they allow citizens who would otherwise be more disenfranchised to learn about the democratic process and to raise questions of quality regarding democracy and good governance.

Democratic institutions and elected governments may or may not open up spaces for democratic participation in development, and may or may not be responsive to the demands of ethnic minorities, women and the poor, and facilitate the management of conflict (real or imagined). Specific institutions, such as the VDCs, at various levels of the political process provide space for the democratisation of development, and for resolving rather than “freezing” potential conflicts that may harden along social divisions (cultural, religious, gender and the like).

7.2. VDC - a Way Forward

VDCs must be salaried and empowered statutorily. It is evident that as non-statutory bodies, VDCs are pulled in different directions by different interest groups with statutory powers. The VDCs potential for democratising and managing development programmes is invisible at national level and is muffled by the lack of a clear policy, akin for instance to CBNRM at district and national levels.

The formation of an Association of VDCs in Ngamiland (AVDCN), to complement a national association, could help VDCs establish more authority in the public arena and with government agencies. These fora could enable VDCs to find a powerful voice in influencing decisions that affect the lives of their constituencies by exchanging ideas, information and experience. The roles and functions of VDCs, which have currently overgrown decades-old structures, could be redefined and strengthened as needed. Such fora would enable systematic capacity building as opposed to ad hoc, non-targeted interventions and unmeasurable objectives.

Optimising the use of public funds allocated to VDCs could be monitored in ways that reduced waste and leakage, and that strengthened mechanisms for democratising development at grassroots level. In so doing, clear terms of reference for VDCs should include responsible accounting and co-ordination of development projects.

VDCs engage in a potpourri of activities. There is a need to identify and articulate priority areas with community development goals and strategies beyond government. Institutional linkages and lines of reporting also need to be clearly defined.

An institutional audit to identify capacity gaps and the training needs of VDCs needs to be carried out to ensure the optimum utilisation of resources, but also for the sustainability of the institution. After four decades of community development, VDCs must stop playing second fiddle in Botswana’s national development symphony.

VDC asset/capital pentagon is highly skewed. Investment in human and financial capital will help balance VDC pentagon and hence raise the institution’s productivity profile and development upkeep.

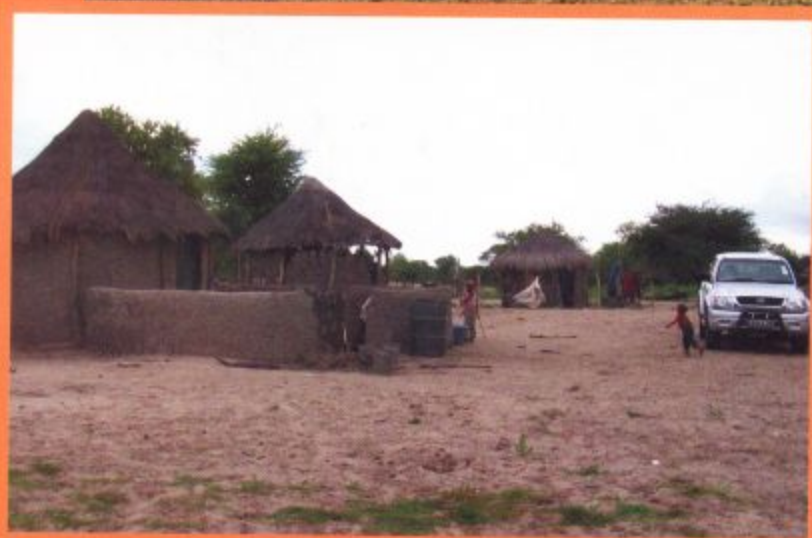
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