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PREFACE

ATIP working papers consist of methodological and empirical material which has been reviewed internally by ATIP. Working papers are prepared and circulated to make ATIP research findings easily available to GOB personnel and researchers interested in Botswana farming systems. The viewpoints expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Agricultural Research, USAID or Kansas State University.

This paper presents information on village groups in Shoshong and Makwate. The investigation of village groups was not a top priority of the Mahalapye team, but some information was collected through several sources. It was hoped that research on the activities and problems of different groups would reveal guidelines for structuring the group based activities of the Ministry of Agriculture. After groups had been investigated, the Mahalapye team formed farmer groups in three village. Based on our experiences with groups, we feel that groups can play an important role in farming systems research and extension activities.

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VILLAGE GROUPS IN SHOSHONG AND MAKWATE

INTRODUCTION

Most ministries, including the Ministry of Agriculture, encourage their field agents to form and work with village groups [Willett, 1981]. Village self-help activities, including drift fencing and dam construction, nearly always are channeled through groups. Since group activities are so common in Botswana villages, a group format may be the best way to promote technological change and administer agricultural assistance programmes. Consequently, improved guidelines on group formation and management should increase the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture to assist farmers.

This progress report reviews recent national research findings on village groups and summarizes selected findings from Shoshong and Makwate on: (a) the activities and problems of groups and (b) patterns in group participation. The last part of the paper reviews experiences with a group formation "institutional experiment" initiated in the 1985-86 season.

RECENT RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research on village groups and voluntary organizations in Botswana has been sponsored by both the Ministry of Local Government and Lands and the Rural Sociology Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture. The objective in most investigations has been to identify major group activities and evaluate their contributions to development. Within the last five years, village groups have been examined by Wynne [1981], Brown [1982], Manzardo [1982], Zufferey [1983a, 1983b], and Baker [1984].

Wynne carried out a study of two villages in each of the North-East, Ngwaketse and Central Districts. She found that the roles of the various village groups and voluntary organizations were not clearly understood and the organizations were not seen as being important. The Village Development Committees (VDC) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) were consistently the most active of the village organizations, followed by the Botswana Council of Women (BCW), the YWCA, cooperatives, and finally the Farmers Committees.

Brown studied local institutions in the Kgatleng District. He found that the VDC was the best known and understood village group. However, the VDCs rarely met and were involved in no major activities. Few of the villages had Farmers Committees. Brown concluded that most village groups made few contributions to rural development. In what they did accomplish, they were oriented toward infrastructure.

Manzardo reported that a lack of experience, training and extension support made it difficult for VDCs to be effective. He distinguished between farmers groups that were the product of the extension staff and those which originated through an attempt by villagers to get local projects underway. The groups that were the product of efforts by extension agents usually had small memberships and rarely met. Groups initiated by villagers, on the other hand, generally were committed to some special purpose and were supported by several active farmers.

Zufferey carried out a series of studies of local institutions in the Central District. He identified a diverse set of problems affecting group organization and operations, including: (a) many members did not understand the purpose of the groups, (b) lack of coordination among groups, and (c) lack of group organization skills.

In 1983, the Mahalapye farming systems team asked Central Region ADs whether Village Development Committees, Farmers Committees, and various special purpose agricultural groups existed in their extension areas. If the

committees or groups did exist, the ADs were then asked to indicate how active they were. Baker reported that Village Development Committees, Farmers Committees, and 4-B clubs were found in nearly all the extension areas but were "very active" in less than twenty percent of areas. More than a third of the VDCs and nearly half of the Farmers Committees were "not very active" or never did anything. Special purpose groups and syndicates did not exist in many areas, but tended to be very active or moderately active in areas where they were found.

In summary, local institutions research in Botswana has consistently led to three observations:

- (a). Most group organizations are making few contributions to village development, mainly due to attendance problems and a lack of focus.
- (b). Activities which represent organized responses to locally felt needs consistently are more successful than those formed by extension workers or those which are part of national organizations.
- (c). The functioning of particular groups depends greatly on the abilities and interests of the particular individuals involved.

GROUPS IN SHOSHONG AND MAKWATE

An overview of the major groups in Shoshong and Makwate was initially compiled during the 1984 Village Institutions and Services Survey. Follow-up information on group activities and problems was collected from most of the groups during February and March, 1985. This section presents a brief overview of the major groups in each village having some relation to agriculture development projects. The section ends with a comparative assessment of the performance of the groups in both villages.

SHOSHONG

Village Development Committee. The main activities of the VDC were the creation of a development trust and construction of three additional buildings for the schools. The VDC had not been coordinating development efforts, which it is supposed to do.

Landboard. Land allocations generally were made every second month. The amount of land allocated depended on the purpose of the allocation. The standard size of a residential plot was 40 by 40 metres, a field was 500 by 800 metres (40 hectares), and business sizes were 30 by 30 metres. The sizes could, however, be extended. The minimum distance between allocations for boreholes was 8 kilometres. Landboards have the right to revoke land allocations if no improvements are made. In its entire history, the Shoshong sub-landboard had revoked seven allocations.

Consumers and Marketing Cooperative. Shoshong had a marketing and credit cooperative with 300 members in 1985. The cooperative provided a marketing outlet to all those interested in selling their livestock and crops to BMC and BAMB. Both members and non-members were charged transport costs. The credit unit of the cooperative offered both short and long term loans to members. Short term loans were available up to a maximum of P300, to be used for ploughing operations. These loans had a grace period of up to a year. Longer term loans were available up to P600, to be used to purchase implements. Long term loans did not have to be paid back for two to three years. The cooperative manager said that the repayment of loans by members had been quite satisfactory. During the 1984/85 ploughing season, no one applied for either a short or long term loan due to the government drought relief programmes.

Farmers Committees. There were separate Farmers Committees for the two largest wards, Phaleng and Bokaa wards. Both were inactive, due to poor attendance, and neither had any current or planned projects.

Fencing Group (East). This was an active group, meeting twice a month. Total membership was 280. The group set a joining fee of P10 for males and P6 for females. Members of the group brewed beer on a rotating basis and sold it to raise funds. Any group member who failed to attend a group meeting was supposed to pay a 50 thebe fine.

Spray Race Group. The spray race group had 13 members in 1985, each of whom paid a joining fee of P100. A cattle crush for both vaccination and deticking, and a spray race structure had all been completed. The chairperson said that several villagers were starting to show interest in the group.

Small Stock Dosing Group. This group had 13 members, all from Phaleng ward. Each member was supposed to pay a small subscription fee at each weekly meeting. The main group project was erecting a dosing structure. The main problems were the failure of some members to pay their fees and poor attendance at meetings.

4-B Clubs. Each of the three schools in Shoshong had a 4-B club. Each member was expected to have a project and to display whatever they had made at 4-F shows and the Agricultural Shows held each winter. The main types of projects were sewing, knitting, gardening, crocheting, wood working, pottery, and basketry. Lack of resources and parental support were cited as the main problems.

The other main groups investigated in Shoshong (not directly related to agriculture) were the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA), Village Health Committee (VHC), Social Welfare Committee (SWC), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), and the Botswana Council of Women (BCW).

MAKWATE

Village Development Committee. The VDC had recently completed work on two buildings for use by village officers. Three other buildings were incomplete due to financial and labour constraints. The main problem faced by the VDC was the poor attendance at kgotla meetings. The VDC chairperson complained that too many villagers refused to participate in self-help projects.

Farmers Committee. There was only one Farmers Committee. It had only met three times since 1977 and had no current or planned projects. The members complained that they were too busy to attend meetings.

Smallstock Group. A smallstock group existed, but was not active. No one had any funds to initiate a project due to the drought.

Fencing Group. A fencing group was formed to put up a drift fence. The fence was completed in late 1985 and the group has since become inactive.

Tick Control Group. The tick control group was relatively active. The main projects were the construction of a storeroom and extension of a kraal. The main problem a lack of money to buy materials.

4-B Club. There was a 4-B club in Makwate but it was not active. No current projects were identified.

The other general purpose groups investigated were the PTA, BCW and VHC.

COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

The studies confirmed that groups in Shoshong and Makwate had the same problems identified elsewhere in Botswana. The groups were an important element of village life but were not operating very effectively. Most of the general purpose groups, such as the VDCs, were oriented toward infrastructure projects. There was a lack of coordination both within and between groups, leading to an overlap in projects and confusion over the roles of different groups.

The VDCs are supposed to be the focal point of village development efforts, but were not playing this role in either Shoshong or Makwate. The VDCs emphasized projects with few beneficiaries rather than their role of setting and coordinating a development agenda. The Farmers Committees were inactive in both villages.

Perhaps the greatest problem facing the groups was poor attendance. However, as found in other studies, the special purpose agricultural groups were among the most active. The existence of projects was an important focal point of these groups. Without specific projects most groups became inactive. Some groups successfully used small fines to ensure attendance, although this may not be possible in a Ministry sponsored group. Alternatively, the groups organized to achieve ends which personally benefited the group members often had fewer attendance problems.

The local extension agents were not providing sufficient leadership for the groups set up in their support. Nevertheless, the groups generally were effective in expanding the coverage provided by extension agents. For example, the Social Welfare and the Village Health Committees in Shoshong made home visits to help the sick and destitute. The extension agent-formed groups were not effective in enforcing regulations.

HOUSEHOLD AND INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION

Household participation in village groups was examined in the 1985 Decision-Unit Management Information (DUMI) Study. Respondents for the DUMI comprised a random sub-set of a random sample of households selected to participate in the 1983 Crop Management Survey. On the master schedule of the DUMI Study, respondents were asked to indicate whether any member of the household had participated in a group sponsored activity during the past five years. In addition, a detailed census was administered in which it was indicated on an individual basis whether a person had participated in a village group activity. The household level question distinguished among groups, while the census question did not.

With reference to permanent groups, more households had participated in 4-B projects than those of any other group, even the VDCs. Still, less than thirty percent of the households had participated in 4-B activities. Members of female-headed households tended to be more active in village groups, as were those from richer households. Women from female-headed households of above average wealth have been observed to be the most active members of the various village groups.

In general, more households participated in group activities sponsored by the village extension agents and leaders than they did the activities of permanent groups. There was especially widespread participation in the fencing group formed by the AD in Makwate.

On an individual basis, only seven percent of 555 individuals enumerated had participated in village groups. The proportion of individuals participating in groups did not change greatly, regardless of whether a household was in Shoshong or Makwate or was male versus female headed. A slightly greater share of household members in households with more than 15 cattle

participated in groups than did those from poorer households.

There were significant differences in individual participation based on gender, role in a household, and age. Ten percent of the females enumerated participated in village groups, compared to only three percent of the males. Most of the participants in groups were either the most senior male or the most senior female in a household. Nearly a third of the most senior females in a household participated in groups and nearly a quarter of the most senior males did as well. Group participation was primarily limited to those above age 40.

EXPERIENCES WITH FARMER GROUPS

After the above group studies had been completed, farmer groups were formed in Shoshong, Makwate and Makoro villages. Two major objectives in forming farmer groups were to identify factors affecting farmers' willingness to modify practices and to facilitate interaction about changes in practices.

GROUP FORMATION

Formation of the groups represented an institutional experiment. Prior on-farm experiments carried out through individual farmers had failed to stimulate community interest. In addition, the focus of most trials had been on tillage-planting systems and had, as a result, involved a disproportionate number of male-headed and richer households. It was hoped that formation of farmer groups would create additional community interest and would broaden the base of farmers involved in on-farm research.

As part of the institutional experiment, different types of groups were formed in the three villages. In Makwate, two groups were at first formed, one comprised females from poor households while the other was based on representatives from households involved in several past ATIP experiments. The groups were later combined, to give one large, heterogeneous group. In Shoshong, the group was based on active and interested farmers who had adequate resources for farming, but were not particularly wealthy. Most participating households were comprised of small conjugal units and both spouses were encouraged to attend meetings. In Makoro, the group involved just females and most were from female-headed households. In addition, nearly half of the members also served on the local VDC. Two of the groups had ten members, while the one in Makwate had 21 members. Most of the individuals attending meetings were females.

GROUP MANAGEMENT

Farmer group meetings were held once a month. Meetings generally consisted of three sets of discussion. The first was a review of the farmers' circumstances and problems since the prior meeting. The second was a discussion of trials implementation (during the early part of the season) and intermediate trial outcomes (during the later part of the season). The final part of each meeting consisted of a discussion of existing government programmes and how farmers might take advantage of each programme.

Several procedures were followed to increase the likelihood of success:

- (a). Seed and advice were given to farmers to provide personal incentives for group membership.
- (b). Open discussions of problems and trials implementation created peer pressure to be more active.
- (c). Regular meeting dates were set to reduce the chance that farmers would forget about meetings.
- (d). Meeting agendas were prepared, to make sure meetings appeared to be

accomplishing something.

(e). Each farmer had one or more trials which served as a focal point for farmer involvement in the groups.

(f). Farmers were taken on field visits so they could compare their relative progress.

ASSESSMENT

The farmer group experiment was generally successful, although not all problems were resolved. The group discussions were particularly helpful in clarifying the instructions for trials and creating pressure to implement trials. The discussions of general farming problems were less satisfying to both staff and group members because most problems had no identifiable solution. For example, there were severe insect pest attacks but there was no possibility of a spraying intervention (neither technically nor economically feasible). The main problem encountered was the drought, which led to the failure of most trials. Particularly in Makwate, there was little planting and this made it difficult to sustain interest in farming systems activities.

The two smaller and more homogeneous groups in Shoshong and Makoro worked out much better. There was a higher rate of successful trial implementation and there were more vigorous discussions. The most animated discussions took place when farmers interacted on the basis of differing personal experiences.

Females attended the group meetings most regularly and were most active in the trials. Males tended to dominate discussions in which they were involved, but often were satisfied to sit back and wait for a topic on which they felt they had relatively greater expertise. The females were more prone to talk about their problems and to seek advice.

After the first season, group members were asked to assess the trials and the group meetings. Every member of each group said that they wanted to be a member of the group during the next season. Also, every member said that he/she understood the instructions for the trials which were presented through the group meetings. All but one member said it was useful to hear about the problems of other farmers. That person was the poorest member of one group and the problems of the other farmers did not seem so severe in comparison.

CONCLUSIONS AND GUIDELINES

The research on village groups was not encouraging. Despite their importance in village life, most groups are not functioning effectively. Since on-farm research and extension activities are supposed to use a group format, improved group formation and management guidelines are needed. Based on village groups research and the farmer group experiment, group formation should take into account the following issues.

First, groups must have specific objectives and, preferably, specific projects which serve to focus the group. The failure of many VDCs and Farmers Committees can be attributed to their lack of focus.

Second, most groups need to have a dual membership structure, and an associated dual meeting structure. If a group is small, it will not impact on the village as a whole. But large groups often fall into inaction due to divergent interests and a lack of organization. Most of the successful groups had small management committees which met regularly and made most of the group's decisions. Other members met only as needed, so meetings were seen as more useful.

Third, some mechanism is needed to ensure attendance. The groups which personally benefited group members had fewer attendance problems. In this context, on-farm trials and demonstrations could be located primarily on the fields of group members, and the ADs could make sure the ALDEP, Drought Relief, and ARAP applications of group members are processed rapidly.

Fourth, even though there should be personal benefits to group membership, the possibility of contributing to the general welfare of the community often was an important motive for the most active group members. One approach would be to have ADs encourage groups to hold field days and to participate, as groups, in the agricultural shows held each year.

Fifth, ADs might need to give special attention to younger farmers. At present, group activities are dominated by senior household members but it is often the younger farmers who tend to innovate. One option might be to set up separate "young farmers" groups. The ADs also should pay more attention to the 4-B clubs, to ensure that 4-B activities focus on farming projects.

To develop additional guidelines, the Ministry should solicit additional advice from the on-farm research teams. By 1985, all the on-farm research teams had started to work with village groups. However, each team has been using a different approach than the one tried in the Central Region. An effort should be made to review and synthesize the experiences with farmer groups.

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