

Proverbs, Community Building and Governance: A Critical Analysis of the Proverbial Saying, “*Kgosi ke Kgosi ka Batho*” in Botswana

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Abstract

The paper examines an important Tswana proverb, “Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho”.¹ It discusses how the proverb facilitates and strengthens human relations in all aspects of life: the political, social, religious and economic spheres. The overarching objective is to examine the functional role of proverbs in conflict resolutions, democratic principles and good governance based on delegation and consultation at all levels in an African community. The paper argues that proverbs are succinct summations of how success, in any given role of responsibility, in this case, the role of kingship, is not dependent solely on an individual’s intellect or their prowess. Rather, success in such positions of responsibility results from one’s willingness to tap into the available ‘democratic’ or communal wisdom and communal support.

In discussing the proverb, Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho, the paper is not making any claim that this proverb is an actual representation of the conduct of kings in Botswana. Rather, the meaning behind the proverb is explored in terms of its potential in providing guidance and influencing the conduct of those in the position of kingship. The paper mainly depends on the review and analysis of existing literature in the field, which shows that the African worldview put strong emphasis on relationships in building the community. The paper concludes that the key purpose of proverbs is to promote a peaceful atmosphere through developing strong relationships in a society.

Keywords: Proverbs; Community building; Governance; Kgosi; Ethics

¹ *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, literally, one is a king through and because of his/her people. *Kgosi* is the title for a hereditary leader among Batswana. It is the Setswana term for “King” or Paramount Chief, which is given to aristocrats in Botswana and other surrounding places like South Africa and Lesotho where there are Tswana or Sotho speaking people. *Batho* means people.

Introduction

The paper examines the role and function of proverbs in creating good governance in an African community by promoting a participatory style of democratic practice, an atmosphere and culture that involves leaders and their subjects. In fact, it would appear that proverbs are not just tools towards good governance. They are themselves products of the people's experiences of what constitutes good governance. It also assesses the effectiveness of proverbs in bringing understanding and order between the leaders and their followers. The paper thus confirms that the definition and meaning of a proverb is closely related to its role and function in a practical context (Gadilaolwe, 2012). Specifically, the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho* presents the functions of the Setswana proverbs in matters of public or people's relations from contexts such as the *kgotla*² or any other public forum. Proverbs are, therefore, a special inheritance from the cultural traditions, wisdom and knowledge of forebearers or ancestors, and their practical functionality commands respect of all.

The paper also demonstrates that proverbs are embedded within African philosophical concepts and worldviews that promote processes and institutions that address the needs and aspirations of society. Proverbs therefore bring to life a wide philosophical outlook in a comprehensive and digestible manner and impart wisdom. The paper further points to the ethical role of proverbs, being to teach about acceptable societal behaviour (manners) and conduct in a particular given context, demanding application to reality and expectation (Gadilaolwe, 2012). The paper also demonstrates the linguistic function of proverbs as an important component of language, which is seen as part of the social culture of the people.

African culture is rich in a wide variety of heritage, which includes proverbs and sayings. Proverbs deal not only with human relations at an ethical and moral level but also at the aesthetic level as they decorate and beautify any language (Mokotimi, 1997). Mokotimi thus writes:

Proverbs are deeply rooted in this culture and almost everyone who grows up in a village becomes a living carrier of proverbs. They are interwoven in local languages. At the same time, they constitute a sub-language of their own... the language of proverbs is a whole way of seeing the world, a way of speaking with other people, a way of feeling the atmosphere in the society in which they live" (Mokotimi, 1997: xi).

African proverbs, therefore, carry with them a very rich culture, which is also reflected in the people's language, songs and ethics. They also put emphasis on respect for old age, which is believed to be a source of wisdom, cultural heritage and experience. As the adage goes, 'when an elder dies a library is burnt'. Such proverbs promote good values and virtues, such as respect, cooperation and friendship. They also discourage bad vices such as anger, disrespect, injustice and discrimination. This is because bad vices lead to

² *Kgotla* refers to the place or enclosure where the community assembles to discuss issues that are of importance to the community, the household or family. The term may also refer to the assembly or the gathering or the meeting itself.

misery and suffering (Mokotimi, 2012). Proverbs, therefore, generally deal with a wide range of issues, that are ethical and moral in nature.

It is therefore important to mention that proverbs are culturally loaded and have a measure of power and authority in uniting, reconciling and educating people. They promote, articulate and encourage good qualities, such as hard work, kinship, love, bravery, strength, unity, trust, justice, fairness, friendship and generosity. Proverbs on the other hand, discourage negative qualities such as laziness, backbiting, injustice, untrustworthiness, greed, slander, lying, murder, arrogance, selfishness, incest etc. (Mokotimi, 2012).

The paper, therefore, analyses the role of *bogosi* (kingship) in an African democratic context and draws conclusions drawn in the light of the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, which is concerned with how decision-making processes and structures are put in place for strengthening governance and promotion of accountability and integrity for leaders. The role played by members of the society in providing the necessary checks and balances, monitoring processes and implementation of programmes is seen as an important factor for the growth of the community.

Theoretical Framework

This paper has greatly benefitted from a theoretical framework used by Peter Vumisa (2012), which focuses on an African worldview. The theory emphasises the understanding of the universe, its origin and the meaning of everything that exists, with a particular focus on the people, their culture and values such as justice, peace and good governance as also expounded by John Mbiti (1970). This culturally structured assumption stresses societal values and beliefs about life and the universe from which one sees and interprets the world. It was mainly influenced by a collection of African beliefs about the relationship between the universe and life held by African people (Vumisa, 2012).

This worldview is also reflected in the relationship between the individual and the community. From the writings of various scholars, at the centre of human relations is the promotion of the value of communality (Gyke 1991; Masolo 2006).

Vumisa similarly writes:

In the African worldview there is a strong emphasis of being in community with others of the same family and clan. An African sees himself as part of the family link coming all the way from the ancestors and carrying on the descendants. The point is illustrated by the adage "*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (isiZulu), which when loosely translated means, "I am because the community is" (Vumisa, 2012: 47).

The 'I am', in the above adage speaks of self-awareness, and self-validation, a bold acknowledgement of one's individuality. However, what this adage also seems to underscore is that this individuality is not in a vacuum, nor a product of itself, such as when people talk of a 'self-made man' or a 'self-made woman'. Instead, the individual traces who they are, and who they can be to the community (-ies) in which they exist. This balanced understanding of the importance of communality thus repudiates the view

that in the African worldview the individual is sacrificed in the process of emphasising the community.

This cultural understanding was perpetuated from time to time and from generation to generation, depending on the prevailing circumstances. A child was born and introduced into this worldview or system of thought, ideas, values and concepts that promoted community life. From birth, a child is introduced to a cultural worldview, which influences him/her as he/she engages in new events and experiences by the family, the community, and the traditional school of initiation, which is known as *bogwera* and *bojale* among Batswana (Vumisa, 2012; Nkomazana, 2007). To further cultivate and promote this worldview in different ways, the child is exposed to traditional narratives and rituals. The Bakgatla in Botswana, for instance, still practice initiation schools for girls and boys when they reach puberty. These schools promote community values and customs (Vumisa, 2012; Nkomazana, 2007). Therefore, the community-based mind-set that is echoed in the proverb, *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho* was also anchored in the upbringing of children in the community.

The African worldview as a concept and in specific reference to the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho* focuses on the principles of participatory leadership, which include mutual dependence, delegation and consultation. These principles will be discussed below.

The Proverb and Participatory Style of Democratic Practice

At the centre of participatory democracy is a quest for inclusivity demonstrated by an inclusive and active participation of people in decision-making, and extensive deliberation on issues that affect people in a given jurisdiction (Zittel 2007). These concerns for participatory democracy relate closely to the principles of mutual dependence, open consultation, freedom of speech, and delegation of responsibility, as expressed in the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*.

This proverb is understood and interpreted within the cultural traditional context of the Batswana tribal government, with the *Kgosi* as the key leader in all leadership structures. The proverb should, therefore, be understood in the context of the democratic systems and principles that relate to the relationship between the *Kgosi* and his subjects. It stresses the point that the chief is responsible to the people and that the people are responsible to the *Kgosi*. It thus promotes and supports a relationship of mutual dependence.

At the political level, the proverb refers to a crucial democratic principle that emanates from the cultural traditions, wisdom and knowledge of the forebearers of the community. At this level, it refers to a broader traditional system of government, which is understood as the government for the people, by the people and of the people. The saying stresses the importance of open consultation and democratic procedures, which promotes dialogue and is core to democracy, peace and cooperation. It, therefore, demands that those in leadership should practically engage, consult with and consider others in using their authority. As such, the proverb strengthened African tribal government structures, which were enshrined on fundamental democratic principles. As a government of the people, for the people, and by the people, its policies generally represented the aspirations and ideas of the people, which were, therefore, not imposed

on the people, but developed through the principle of open consultation that occurred within the cultural and religious contexts of the people.

Central to these democratic systems of the Batswana were three fundamental institutions. The first institution was the *kgotla*, which refers to the traditional court, where political debates were resolved and decisions and policies were finalised. Next is the *bogosi*, that is, the kingly office, power or authority, which was anchored on the third institution, the legal social systems or the Tswana traditional or customary law. All these three contributed towards creating order, peace and harmony in the society.

The procedures and debates of the *kgotla*, as a forum in which state matters and community disputes were aired and resolved, followed the substance of this well-known proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, which insisted on a government for, by and of the people, and stressed the importance of open consultation and democratic procedures. It was the *kgotla*'s responsibility to protect and preserve this fundamental democratic right, which emanated from the cultural traditions, wisdom and knowledge of the forebearers or ancestors.

Key to the *kgotla*'s identity, operations and existence, was a very important basic democratic principle that, "*mmualebe o bua la gagwe*," which guaranteed freedom of speech, opinion and participation as a fundamental right for all people living together in a given community (Schapera, 1956).

To strengthen this democratic practice and maximise participation of people in community affairs, the *kgotla* structure was also duplicated at both the family and clan levels. At family level, for instance, family members, would gather around fireplaces to eat and talk over the news of the day. David Livingstone observed that at clan level, the community was seen to be very important to the extent that *dikgosana* (sub chiefs) actively ensured there was maximum participation and consultation (Livingstone, 1857).

The key point here is that the *kgotla* system is strategically placed to reach the community at different levels, such as the ward and family levels. These structures were characterised by the practice of delegation of responsibilities, hence the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*." In this case, it refers to the value that goes with the support that the leadership receives from those delegated with responsibilities, their skills and experiences.

The role of the *bogosi* (kingship) and *kgosi* (king) was key to the function of the *kgotla* and life of the community. The historical traditions and writings of the early observers show that people looked to their *kgosi* in all social and political matters. The personal observations of missionaries such as Robert Moffat, an agent of the London Missionary Society (LMS) among the Batlhaping of Kudumane from the 1820s to the 1870s and William Charles Willoughby, another LMS missionary, among the Bangwato of Palapye and Serowe, in the 1890s, reveal that kingship was an important component of the tribal democratic government among the Batswana (Chirenje, 1977: 33; Philip, 1828:131). Kingship was governed by the principles of the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho* (Chirenje, 1977; Philip, 1828). Moffat, furthermore, pointed out that: "Each tribe has its own chief or king ... and is held sacred from his hereditary right to that office" (Moffat, 1842:66).

A *kgosi* is also highly respected and accepted as the earthly representative of the *badimo* (ancestors). John Mackenzie (1871) describes their position as unique. Agreeing with Moffat, he confirmed that the "*bogosi*" among the Batswana is hereditary. He also

points out that the *kgosi* in his own person possesses the offices of the king, supreme judge, commander-in-chief and priest. Talking about Sekhoma, a *kgosi* of the Bangwato in the 1850s, Mackenzie shows that he exercised the functions belonging to all these offices and was held by his advisors to excel in them all (Mackenzie, 1871: 371). In the spirit of the proverb, Sekgoma worked with his advisors and councillors, who were knowledgeable and skilled in various aspects of the life of the community. This greatly contributed to excellence in the performance and execution of *bogosi* responsibilities.

Through praise and proverbial sayings, a *Kgosi* was highly exalted and ceremonially addressed. He was highly regarded and distinguished as the most senior individual of his ethnic group. He was accepted as a role model, in terms of conduct, speech and the way he related with his people. The proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho* therefore, reminded him that he was to rule and handle all affairs, democratically and with integrity. While his duties and powers “extended over many different spheres of tribal life,” and overall accountability over issues of public policy, he was aided by advisers and elders, in that capacity and in promulgating new laws and amending or abolishing others, organising regimental and other large-scale activities and taking whatever action seemed appropriate in cases of war, pestilence, famine or some other calamity. He regulated the distribution and use of land, the cycle of agricultural work, and other economic matters. He often led the tribal army in war and arranged or personally performed many religious ceremonies on behalf of the tribe (Schapera, 1953).

While *bogosi* is a supreme office in all the affairs of the ethnic group, the *Kgosi* was expected to work closely with tribesmen, uncles, other advisers from the royal family and the members of the community. The proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, thus demanded that he ruled through consultation and delegation (Mackenzie, 1871; Willoughby, 1828). Within the cultural context, there were clearly defined democratic principles that guided the day-to-day operations of tribal government. His success in running the affairs of the community depended on how effectively he consulted with his headmen and the community as a whole. The proverbial saying, was, therefore, a reminder that the strength and influence of the king depended on how connected he was with his own people. Any attempt to act otherwise or try to employ dictatorial tendencies was strongly opposed and guarded against at all costs. A leader was expected to represent the aspirations of the people.

Another important cultural institution that played a crucial role in facilitating the spirit and principles of democracy were the traditional/customary laws. They were believed to have been divinely instituted by *Modimo* (God-given) from time immemorial (Willoughby, 1923:99). They were carefully transmitted from one generation to the next in order to strengthen the principle and view that *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*. During the *bogwera* schools (the boys initiation into manhood), young men were among other things, initiated into traditional laws and administration of the *morafe* (the community) to prepare for the future transfer of power. It was, therefore, an essential cultural tradition, training and education that contributed towards preserving democratic principles and practices.

Believing that these laws were directly given by their fore-fathers, tribal communities tenaciously clung to these customs and laws and enforced the belief, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho* (Mackenzie, 1871). Sekgoma I, who was said to have been a ruler of one of the ethnic groups among Batswana in the 1850s, for instance, held a strong conviction about

this and consequently defended these customs of his people. When confronted by John Mackenzie to accept missionary Christianity, which demanded a wholesale abandonment of these laws and customs, he pitifully cried, saying, "How should I answer to Khari, if I changed the customs of my town" (Mackenzie, 1871:397). Khari, who was already dead at the time, was Sekgoma's father. Sekgoma felt that he was not just upholding the customs for the sake of the living, but for the sake of the departed as well. Sekgoma insisted that customary practices had a role in the life of Batswana.

Discussing the future of the customary law in Botswana, Kgosi Seepapitso IV of the Bangwaketse, pointed out that these laws must be cherished and nurtured. He further argued that this did not mean importing foreign values. He warned that as a nation we should not simply embrace foreign concepts which have no relevance to us. He alluded to the fact that, while the customary laws are practiced, they are not coded. Furthermore, this importance was evidenced by the vast numbers of customary courts all over the country and the *kgotla* assemblies, to which people are still summoned, and many continue to attend these assemblies. Their major function, however, is to promote justice and settle disputes, which are core to the fundamental cultural norms and values of creating a democratic environment. Ataliah Molokomme (1994) also points out that customary law is important because it is accessible to the majority of people, who live under customary law and with most of their cases settled democratically, through consultation and maximum participation of the members of community as guided by the spirit of the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*. Molokomme also points out that in traditional Tswana society everybody had a chance to express his or her views. Husbands, uncles, brothers and grandfathers asked for the views of their wives, daughters, mothers, grandmothers and sisters at home in order to incorporate them into the decisions and policies of the community. This is all about participatory democracy, which the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, suggests is interwoven into the lifestyle of the people.

The power of the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, is therefore fully displayed in cultural and religious contexts, which occupies the heart of everything that takes place in the society. It is the heart of the political, social and economic activities of the society. The *kgotla*, the *bogosi* and the traditional law are all established and formulated around the religious factor, which is highly regarded as key to the future progress and survival of the community. This is why there is a strong concept of divine authority attached to the political leadership of a *kgosi*. A *kgosi* will bring advisers, assistants and religious priests into his circle of leadership to facilitate the process of consultation with the community and strengthen their divine power and attributes. It is this that contributes towards their being considered not only as sacred and divine rulers, but also as divinely instituted, thus believed to be mediators between the people and the ancestors (Mbiti, 1969). The concept of divine kingship (*bogosi*), suggests that a *Kgosi* is divinely appointed by *Modimo*, hence possessing divine power and spiritual attributes. The saying, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho* therefore embraces all these aspects that are cultural, spiritual, political, social and economic, which were believed to facilitate democratic principles and practices (Willoughby, 1938; Willoughby, 1928).

Willoughby, having personally observed the day-to-day experiences of the Batswana, wrote a very interesting book entitled the *Soul of the Bantu* (1928) to describe the centrality of religion in all spheres of their lives. He observed that "Bantu life is basically

religious” and that “Religion so pervades the life of the people that it regulates their doing and governs their leisure to an extent that it is hard for Europeans to imagine” (Willoughby, 1928:1). Supporting this observation, Bolaji Idowu argues that, “Religion has always served a purpose – a purpose which belongs to the very fabric of life itself – and thus is a fact of history as of experience” (Idowu, 1973:1). He further raises a fundamental point about the function and influence of religion, which he says serves a societal purpose, compels the community to conform to its ideals, belongs to the fabric of people’s life and holds the whole society together. In this context, the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, points to the fact that a leader cannot achieve these functions single-handedly but that he needs other people’s support and active participation.

The role of proverbs in African societies is therefore to educate, impart wisdom and convey life-giving lessons. They explicate the metaphysical, epistemological and ethical realities in people’s lives. They play an important part in African cultures and societies everywhere. When carefully examined, proverbs will represent a tremendous amount of cultural depth, history and values, such as ambition, virtue, generosity and patience. The proverb, *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho*, is all about these attributes and the inclusion of the community and its participation in decision making processes. This is seen as essential to the growth and influence of the community.

However, notwithstanding the need for *kgosi* to adhere to the aspirations of his people and to the advice of the elders, it may be important to note that his individuality or autonomous decision-making capacity was not disregarded in the process. This is confirmed by Tswana proverbs such as, *lefoko la kgosi le agelwa mosako* (the king’s word takes precedence), *kgosi thipa e sega molootsi* (the king will discipline even the advisors). Therefore, ‘interrelatedness’ (between the king and the community) does not necessarily imply the death of individual entities. Logically, it will be difficult to talk of interrelatedness without first acknowledging the existence of the individual entities that are involved.

Cases When the Proverb was under Challenge

Having discussed how participatory style of democratic practice may be garnered from the proverb, *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho*, one may need to critically bring to the fore issues surrounding the wayward behaviour of the *Kgosi* in history of *Bogosi* in Botswana. In this way, what is encapsulated in the proverb, may also be appreciated even in such cases. It may be interesting to note that in such cases, and perhaps in line with this proverb, there were efforts to make sure that the king is not a dictator but instead press for justice.

Such problem cases may include the kingship of Molefhi of the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela. It is noted that the young *Kgosi* Molefhi was troublesome and mistreated his mother and the members of his tribe, that is, those who had decided to follow the Zion Christian Church (Matemba 2005: Tabalaka and Kenosi 2024). Further, contrary to the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, Molefhi often disregarded the advice of his uncles. As Morton (1987:84–85) notes, “Molefhi seldom listened to these men . . . Molefhi was usually late to the *kgotla*, if not absent, and disinclined to keep his uncles informed of his whereabouts.” Morton notes that Molefhi was removed from *bogosi* and his young brother, Mmusi, was consequently appointed to act in his stead.

Besides Molefhi, the other *Kgosi* whose behaviour was contrary to the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, was Sekgoma II of the Bangwato, who became a problematic ruler,

abusing alcohol and failing to efficiently run the affairs of the *morafe*. Like Molefhi, he refused to take counsel from his uncles and other elders of the tribe (Hepburn, 1895).

Matsheng, *kgosi* of the Bangwato, was yet another example whose conduct was problematic. He had been captured by Mziligazi and was brought back to his people through the influence of Robert Moffat, an LMS missionary agent. His arrival led to the reigning leader Kgosi Sekgoma deposed and replaced by him. Against the dictates of the Setswana proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, he immediately began to copy and introduce Mziligazi's dictatorial style of government, abusing his authority and disregarding his advisers and the *kgotla* system. However, to demonstrate that the power of *Kgosi* is from the people, his people acted together and removed him from power and recalled Sekgoma I from exile (John Mackenzie, 1871).

The above examples show us that there have indeed been some *dikgosi* who ignored the importance of participatory style of leadership as encapsulated in the proverb, *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho*. The examples also demonstrate the adverse consequences of such actions by *dikgosi*.

Post-Independence Shifts from Traditional Government

After navigating the richness of the traditional system of governance as expressed in the proverb, *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho*, below, the paper seeks to expose how the post-independence systems of governance have overlooked the promotion of unity and justice expressed in the traditional thought systems.

The deplorable situation of African governance is documented widely in literature (Bates, 2008). Among many factors, the present-day African governance challenges have been linked to first, a self-centred predatory attitudes of leaders who steal from their own nations for personal gain and to protect their positions. As a response to this, the second factor involves citizens taking up arms, engaging in unending competition over limited resources, often resulting in further erosion of both the countries' resources and proper governance (Bates, 2008)

One thus notes a shift from the principles espoused in the proverb, *Kgosi le Kgosi ka batho*, as discussed above. One such principle was mutual dependence between the *Kgosi* and the people he/she is leading. In the atmosphere of this mutual dependence, the greatness of a *Kgosi* would not be exclusively based on his own welfare, but more on the welfare of the people he is leading. In such a case then, the leader might not be tempted to steal from his/her nation for personal gain. Bringing this principle into today's discussion on governance will mean that leaders of states and regions will appreciate that there is no true progress of any leader who ignores or takes advantage of their own people. This is because the defining element of greatness for any true leader is how great they are in leading the people, not how much they have amassed. The predatory attitude that was presented above would not find a place when *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho* becomes the definition of true leadership.

Besides mutual dependence, the proverb, *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho*, speaks of shared victory as well as shared challenges, where it was noted that the proverb underscores the fact that the problems of the *Kgosi* are perceived as the problems of the people and vice versa. Furthermore, the victories or accomplishments (including resources) of the *Kgosi* are perceived to be shared with the people. As such, stealing from the national coffers would be strongly discouraged. The proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, may also remind

us to appreciate that in the challenges faced by African states today, what is lost in the process is not only the economic side but also the disintegration of the society and the communal fabric. Embedded in the *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho* is the element of trust for the *Kgosi* by the people he/she leads. People follow their leader because they trust their leader. They take up arms not only because they lost their resources, but also because they no longer trust their leaders.

The participatory style of democratic practice expressed in the proverb also makes us aware of what has occurred when governance shifted from wider participation (as in the ancient states) to representation (in the modern world). A challenge seems to have come with the shift, for example, from the antique democracy to the modern or liberal democracy. Unlike in modern-day democracy, the antique democracy, such as in ancient Athens, was such that people openly engaged in extensive discussions on matters that affected them. Common good was at the centre of the decisions, such that the best decision was the one that brought about good for the larger population. Citizen participation in decision making was so enormous that one can properly say that the people were themselves the government (Fuchs 2007). Contrastingly, in modern democracy, emphasis is on the few representatives who are elected to make decisions on behalf of the people. Thus, participation in the decision-making process is curtailed. While there may be consultative referendums to solicit the views of the people, the decisions made ultimately focus on the parliament of representative than on the views of the masses. The *kgotla* institution, with its position that, '*mafoko a kgotla a mantle otlhe*' (the value for various perspectives), coupled with the view that *Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho* serves as a reminder on the unparalleled value of extended participation of the people for any progressive government.

Conclusion

Through the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, the paper has endeavoured to show that we always need other people to show us the right path in life. While the *Kgosi*, as the communal leader is invested with power and mandate to rule, the ultimate success of his leadership is not embodied simply on his person. Rather, he has to be cognisant of the fact that his success as a leader of the people lies on the rich experiences of his people, and on the knowledge of the dynamics of life in the community which he leads. The proverb is, therefore, about the power, significance and importance of relationships, which require the wisdom of the elders in a given society. The importance of relationships suggests that the *Kgosi* must recognise that it is essential to utilise the resources, skills, experiences and talents of his community to effectively run the community. It is incumbent on those in positions of leadership to create a conducive environment that will allow members of the community to come forward and participate in various activities. The leader must through consultation and *kgotla* forums engage and appreciate the role that members of the community can play in supporting and promoting the tribal democratic principles based on consultation, participation and delegation of responsibilities.

In African society, wisdom to succeed is a composite whole, a property of what the community has to offer to its members at will. Finally, it is argued that the meaning of the proverb, *Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho* is buttressed in other proverbs. Further, it seems that the meaning of the proverb under discussion is also anchored on messages and

lessons promoted by other cultures as well, for example, in the book of Proverbs 13: 20, which says, "Whoever walks with the wise will become wise, whoever walks with fools will suffer harm".

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