

# THE MANIFESTO EXPERIMENT AND INTERNAL ELECTIONEERING IN THE BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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## ABSTRACT

*Written manifestos seem to be a rarity in intra-political party electioneering in Africa, and there is a view that African party electioneering is largely non-issue based, instead being personality-driven. This article observes that the phenomenon seems applicable even to Africa's supposed 'senior democracy', Botswana. Yet, the enduring, issueless factional electioneering of the long-ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) resulted in a significant, albeit one-off, interregnum in 2015. In the 2014 general elections, the combined opposition had garnered 53% of the popular vote, while the BDP received just 47%. The BDP managed to hold onto power, however, due to the country's first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system. This development appears to have shaken and confused the elites of the BDP and caused concern among the party's hard-line factionalists. Subsequently, Botsalo Ntuane did extremely well in the party's 2015 central committee elections. In an unprecedented move he competed for the influential position of secretary general as an independent candidate and with an actual policy manifesto. This move was outside of the traditional factional sponsorship method long-dominant within the BDP. However, the factionalists soon regrouped and acted to marginalise him and his manifesto. Ntuane consequently performed quite poorly in the later 2017 elections, which once again were fought along strict factional lines with no space for ideas or policies. This article argues that Ntuane's manifesto may have been perceived as too radical and unacceptably ambitious by the conservative party elites. This manifesto also seems to have threatened entrenched personal interests and corrupt practices within the BDP-led government. The article concludes with a note on the dynamics and results of the 2019 general elections.*

**Keywords:** electioneering, factions, manifesto, corruption, reform

Ntuane's expenditure to rally the democrats to a debate so that this year's Congress might be fought on ideas is enticing enough. It prescribes a break with the past – however half-heartedly. But without first conceding to the existence of deep-seated problems by those in power, such a rally to arms will no doubt fall on deaf ears.

Spencer Mogapi 2015

## INTRODUCTION

In theory, political issues or ideas and policy alternatives are central in electioneering. These tend to be limited to party manifestos, which are produced for national elections. Manifestos certainly play a critical role in elections in liberal democracies worldwide (Caplan 2007; Kiewert & Mattozzi 2008). However, in emerging African democracies it is claimed that personalities, as opposed to clearly articulated manifestos, play a primary role: 'The literature on Africa has tended to dismiss these campaigns as largely lacking in substance and focused entirely on the clientelist and ethnic appeals that are argued to dominate electoral contests' (Bleck & van de Walle 2011). A strong point is made by Bleck and van de Walle who argue 'that such a view is at best a simplification. It is true that elections in Africa rarely elicit appeals to class cleavages, but the absence of ideological debate should not be confused for a dearth of programmatic politics' (Bleck & van de Walle 2012, p.1395). They further contend that African 'political parties do in fact invoke salient political issues, but usually through valence appeals, rather than by taking identifiable positions. Though electoral campaigns in Africa include much mediocre rhetoric and sometimes less than edifying personal insults and empty posturing, they do also include discussions of the political issues that resonate with their constituents' (ibid.).

However, with regard to *internal* party politics, it is extremely rare for a central committee or internal party election candidate to produce a manifesto, let alone a written one, in competing against other party members. A rare occurrence of this phenomenon occurred in 2015 in Botswana within the ruling BDP. This event was in fact so exceptional that it threatened to shake up politics within the party and undermine the personality-driven factional politics that have bedevilled the BDP for decades. A discussion of this incident is the subject of this article.

## THE BDP'S ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Ideology is largely absent from politics within Botswana, apart from a generic commitment to free market policies:

[P]olitical party competition is based on or generated by political ideas and policy alternatives. However, a defining characteristic of political parties in Botswana is that they do not present clear ideological differences... Based on the basic maxim of political science, ideology is understood to mean the vision or the worldview that political parties develop for and about society with a view to shaping its future. It is a guide to action or non-action. However, if by ideology we mean... a set of theoretical assumptions that represent a guiding philosophy for political parties, then its lack of rigour raises important questions for the Botswana situation... What seems to beset Botswana's campaign trail is that it is not based on issues but differences of personalities.

(Molomo 2000, pp. 69–74)

The BDP was formed in 1962 and easily won the 1965 national elections that led to the independence of Botswana from British colonial rule on 30 September 1966. Since then the party has won all national elections, held every five years, in what Doorenspleet (2003, p.171) has described as the 'senior democracy in Africa'. A brief background to the party's organisational structure in relation to central committee elections may be helpful for contextual purposes:

The constitution of the BDP provides for a mass-based structure. It has an elaborate structure working upwards from the party cell, sub-wards, wards, sub-branches, a regional organization, the National Congress, up to the National Council and a Central Committee... Article 28 of the BDP constitution stipulates composition of the Central Committee. It consists of eighteen members as follows: the President; the Chairperson; the Secretary General; the Deputy Secretary General; the Treasurer; the Deputy Treasurer; ten ordinary members of the party; Chairpersons of the Women and Youth Wings. The Central Committee meets when convened by the President of the Party, or at the requisition of at least one third of its members. It controls the day to day affairs of the party with power to determine the policy within the framework of decisions taken by the National Council and/or National Congress. It is also responsible for and has the power to make regulations for the effective running and administration of the party.

(Lekorwe 2005, pp.124–125)

Although Lekorwe was writing in 2005, the status quo remains largely the same today. Whereas Article 29 of the party's constitution provides for the election of the party president, this has not happened from the time of the party's formation

in 1962 until 2019 when the former president (Ian Khama, 2008-2018) and the incumbent president of the party (Mokgweetsi Masisi) publicly disagreed, and Khama rallied a faction against Masisi in a bid to oust him. The campaign was acrimonious and controversial, yet it was not based on ideas as neither Masisi nor his challenger, Pelonomi Venson-Moitoi, had either manifestos or personal platforms. Venson-Moitoi had claimed that she would produce a manifesto to challenge Masisi, but this never appeared.

The party structure consists of electoral colleges, councillors, regions and, most importantly for central committee elections, delegates. By the time the BDP held its central committee elections in July 2017, its electoral college had eight categories. These included the central committee, members of parliament, councillors, the National Youth Executive Committee, the National Women's Executive Committee, regions and delegates. 'Under the BDP strategy of one person one vote it means that nine members within the Central Committee will have to forfeit their votes as members of parliament as they cannot vote twice. All the MPs will have a vote including the specially elected ones but those holding positions in other portfolios... will have only one vote' (Mmeso 2017).

Mmeso further noted that councillors 'are the king makers as they have numbers as there are more than 500 councillors. The councillors are said to be also very influential on who are elected into regional committees and elected as delegates for the congress. Candidates are jostling to have them on their side' (ibid.). He also noted that when it came to regions, these 'translate into 28 votes as each has been allocated two votes. There are 14 regions'. As for delegates 'this is where the votes lie as they constitute the highest number. They are 570 as each constituency will send 10 delegates' (ibid.). When elections are fought along factional lines, as is normally the case, a great deal of manipulation and buying or bribing the delegates by faction elites is the norm within the BDP.

Every-day party activities are handled by the executive secretary who reports to the secretary general. Sir Ketumile Masire, a BDP founding member, first secretary general (1962-1980) and later president (1980-1998), wrote that:

The office kept members informed, looked after membership recruitment, and followed the activities of MPs and local councillors.... The Executive Secretary of the party needed to understand the issues facing the nation and the party, and he or she also needed to be well informed about what was going on in terms of both legislation and policy. We involved the Executive Secretary in the parliamentary caucus, as we wanted the Executive Secretary to be available when matters relevant to the party were being discussed.

(Masire 2006, p. 54-55)

It is worth noting that Ntuane was the executive secretary from the mid-1990s to 2004, when he became an MP.

### FACTIONALISM WITHIN THE BDP

Since the early 1990s, the BDP's central committee elections have been fought between hostile factions who have neither ideological or policy issues, but are rather underpinned by personal antipathies and the pursuit of private interests (Makgala 2006; Makgala & Botlhomilwe 2017, pp. 54–72). The different factions produce what they call 'lobby lists' of their candidates for different central committee positions, which are circulated secretly or sometimes published in newspapers or leaked to social media. There already exists an appreciable literature on the origins, dynamics, durability, and management of factions in Botswana's political parties (Makgala 2006; Makgala & Botlhomilwe 2017, pp. 54–72; Makgala & MacGiollabui 2014, pp. 69–86; Maundeni & Seabo 2013, pp. 28–39; Masire 2006; Magang 2008; Nasha, 2014; Merafhe 2015; Poteete 2012).

Factions have become critical to central committee elections in the BDP, and it is not the calibre of a candidate that matters, but the strength of the faction that sponsors the candidate. According to Margaret Nasha, former speaker of parliament and a losing candidate for the secretary general position in 2005, BDP factions engage in aggressive recruitment of members, hold secret nocturnal meetings, raise funds, spy on each other, and plot against each other (Nasha 2014). Defections from one faction to another for personal advantage are quite common. 'Democrats [BDP members] tend to derive immeasurable pleasure in destroying each other and in the process pulling the party down the drain. Sad but true' (Nasha 2014, p. 105).

In the build-up to the 2009 central committee elections, the BDP was polarised into two major hostile factions. One faction, the so-called A-Team, had the full backing of President Ian Khama, while the rival Barathaphati (those who love the party), was headed by a BDP veteran, Daniel Kwelagobe. The latter faction swept the board at bitterly contested intraparty elections, reflecting a generalised discontent within the party towards Khama. However, as per tradition, the president of the party was not challenged and thus Khama retained the position. He quickly marginalised and nullified the newly elected central committee by filling many party committees with his loyalists (Makgala & MacGiollabui 2014). This was followed by Khama's persecution campaign of Barathaphati leaders, including Ntuane, who eventually defected from the BDP to form their own party, the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD).

## THE 2014 GENERAL ELECTION

For the first time since Botswana gained independence in 1966 the BDP faced a real threat of losing power. Opposition parties (with the exception of the Botswana Congress Party (BCP)) had formed an alliance, the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC). The labour movement had played a critical role in this development, with the Botswana Federation of Public Sector Unions (BOFEPUSU), which represented close to 100,000 government employees, staging the longest strike in the history of the country's public service from mid-April to late June 2011. This had followed Khama's refusal to increase government workers' salaries by the 16% which BOFEPUSU was demanding (Makgala & Malila 2014). A large number of workers were dismissed from work as a result of the strike, which had become heavily politicised.

Opposition politicians exploited the situation and addressed BOFEPUSU rallies where Khama's government was severely criticised. Trade unionists and opposition politicians began to chant calls for regime change, much to the alarm of the BDP and the government (Makgala & Malila 2014). Most importantly, the militant BOFEPUSU leadership managed to influence and back the formation of the UDC, something opposition parties themselves had failed to achieve since independence. Moreover, BOFEPUSU, the American Embassy in Gaborone and a few other groups sponsored debates by parliamentary candidates on the privately-owned Gabz FM radio station. The BDP boycotted the debates, although many BDP activists felt it was unwise for the party to do so (Manual Workers Union 2016a). Historically, the BDP/government axis had marginalised the opposition by denying them access to state resources and had proved itself unwilling to provide a level playing field at election times (Molomo & Sebudubudu 2005; Magang 2008). BOFEPUSU radically changed this situation.

In addition, BOFEPUSU published a hit list of politicians, mostly from the BDP, whom the federation felt acted against the interests of the workers. Meanwhile, the country's biggest trade union, the Manual Workers Union, issued a lengthy and well-prepared document, *Two Years to Vision 2016 Yet Too Far Away!: A Quick Guide to Disturbing Developments in the Governance of Botswana*. This was distributed to voters to influence them to vote against the BDP. On its front page, the privately-owned *Mmegi* newspaper had a daily countdown to the elections, using a photograph of a ballot box with photographs of the three presidential candidates (BDP, UDC and BCP). The box had six issues of great concern to the voter written on its side: unemployment, land, services, corruption, education, and civil liberties.

The subsequent general elections, held on 24 October 2014, proved to be the most competitive ever. The BDP, which was used to easy victories, faced a tough

contest from the UDC. Eventually, the opposition parties secured 53% of the popular vote and the BDP's popular vote plummeted to 47%. It held onto power, however, through the FPTP arrangement, winning 37 out of 57 parliamentary seats. The UDC obtained 17 seats and the BCP 3 seats. It was this reversal of party fortunes that motivated Botsalo Ntuane to throw his hat into the ring for the position of secretary general during the 2015 central committee elections.

### ENTER BOTSALO NTUANE

Ntuane cut his teeth as an activist of note in student politics at the University of Botswana in the early 1990s, where he helped make the then unpopular BDP more visible on campus. His industry was noticed by President Masire who co-opted him into the party leadership as a specially nominated member of the central committee. Not long thereafter, Ntuane was appointed executive secretary for the BDP, at which he excelled, and was subsequently nominated as a specially elected member of parliament by President Festus Mogae (1998–2008) following the 2004 general elections, which the BDP had won comfortably.

From early on as a parliamentarian, Ntuane was a maverick and non-conformist, while the BDP has always put a premium on conformity. Ntuane became an active member of the Barataphathi faction that defeated Khama's group during the 2009 central committee elections. When this faction broke away from the BDP to form the BMD, Ntuane served as the BMD's vice president and also became the leader of the opposition in parliament. However, in 2012 he defected back to the BDP. This proved to be a mistake, as he lost his Gaborone Bonnington South constituency to BMD's president, Ndaba Gaolathe, in the 2014 general elections.

After initially dithering, Ntuane announced in February 2015 that he would be competing for the position of secretary general of the BDP in the party election scheduled for early July 2015. Much against entrenched tradition, Ntuane declared that he would be contesting the election as an independent candidate, not representing any faction. Eschewing factions and going it alone was apparently based on his determination to become something of a unifier, prepared to work with any BDP member (Ntuane 2015b). The 2015 BDP central committee election was in fact notable for its range of independent candidates, competing mostly for the party chairmanship against Ian Khama's vice president, Mokgweetsi Masisi. These candidates were Tebelelo Seretse, Ndelu Seretse, Tshakedi Khama (Ian Khama's younger brother) and Biggie Butale. Ultimately, Ntuane competed for the secretary generalship position against Gaotlhaetse Matlhabaphiri, Ntuane's long time mentor and campaign manager, who unexpectedly abandoned Ntuane to contest against him.

Ntuane had over the years written insightful articles for local newspapers on various socio-economic and political issues. As a parliamentarian he visited various African countries as part of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) election observer missions. He wrote informatively on historical, socio-economic and political situations in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and at one point reviewed the autobiography of the Zimbabwean opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai (Ntuane 2012). His growing influence led to him being described as ‘a consummate strategist and intellectual of note’ and that ‘all the three candidates for BDP Chairmanship (Ndelu Seretse, Tebelelo Seretse and Tshekedi Khama) want him on their respective lists for the position of Secretary General. For the first time in many years Ntuane feels he is back where he belongs – kingmaker’ (Mogapi 2015). Ntuane, however, decided to go it alone.

#### NTUANE’S ROADMAP

Ntuane’s lengthy manifesto, *BDP Reform Agenda Conversation: 22 Discussion Points* was published in two newspaper installments in May 2015. A manifesto of this nature was an unprecedented development in the BDP. Ntuane opened his manifesto by dismissing faction lobby lists as divisive and denying delegates the freedom to elect capable candidates ‘simply because they are on the “wrong” list’ (Ntuane 2015a). He also gave a brief background to previous discussions on reform in the BDP when the party faced an uncertain future after the Botswana National Front (BNF) won an unprecedented 13 out of 40 parliamentary seats in the 1994 general elections. Unlike in 2015, the previous reform discussions in the BDP in the 1990s were not the brainchild and project of a single candidate. Instead, South African political scientist Lawrence Schlemmer had been brought in as a consultant to reorganise the internal structures of the BDP.

Ntuane argued that ‘The world over, when parties are faced with existential threats to their prospects for growth, in the case of opposition, or in the instance of incumbents their grip on power, they engage in conversations around reforms’ (Ntuane 2015a). To support this contention, he gave an example of the Labour Party in Britain which had lost power to the Conservative Party in 1979. It remained in opposition for nearly two decades until it reformed itself in 1995 as New Labour, subsequently winning the general elections in 1997. Closer to home, Ntuane gave examples of the ruling South West African Peoples’ Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia and the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) in South Africa. Surprisingly, Ntuane did not balance his observation by indicating that in many other countries ruling parties went on to lose elections despite efforts at reform.

Ntuane believed that, while the controversial BDP primary elections may have had a negative impact on the party, as the losers allegedly did not support the winners, the youth, middle class and the unemployed were the most critical factors in voting against the BDP. Unemployment, particularly among the youth and graduates of tertiary institutions, had reached crisis levels in the country (Manual Workers Union 2016b). The unilateralist President Ian Khama also appeared hostile to the middle class while enthusiastically embracing rural folk and urban poor with populist and paternalistic programmes (Hamer 2016). However, Khama was openly hostile to unionised government workers, as evidenced by the 2011 strike. Ntuane argued that the BDP ought not marginalise the labour movement or other sections of the society, such as the private media and university students.

His 22 *Discussion Points* were divided into four distinct areas, namely party, government/economic development, electoral reforms and others. As for the party, Ntuane advocated for what he called a strong activist central committee. He also argued for the strengthening of the BDP's policy forum in order 'to vet and report to Central Committee all government Bills ahead of tabling before Parliament. Likewise in the case of public policy, ahead of any unveiling of schemes and programmes of government, the Policy Forum must accordingly advise Central Committee as the final political arbiter, for endorsement' (Ntuane 2015a).

Revival of regular party workshops and seminars throughout the country to strengthen political education in the party was also stressed. As far as Ntuane was concerned, this political education had to put more emphasis on the BDP and Botswana's founding values in the form of nationalism and the country's developmental trajectory. As if taking his cue from the ill-advised non-participation by the BDP in the radio debates building up to the 2014 elections, Ntuane worried that 'It is evident that pound for pound the opposition is outboxing us in public communication'. Hence, he advised the BDP to secure 'competent spokespersons who will make our voice heard by articulating policies and defending the organisation'.

The second instalment of Ntuane's 22 *Discussion Points* focussed on issues of governance or economic development. The argument was that through a strong activist central committee, the BDP 'must restore confidence and credibility in its government by robustly addressing increasingly damaging perceptions/allegations of corruption and abuse of public office' (Ntuane 2015b). Whereas for many years Botswana had been routinely described by Transparency International as the least corrupt country in Africa, at home there was growing concern that the ruling elites had become increasingly corrupt and had mismanaged national resources with impunity (Mogalakwe & Nyamnjoh 2017; Manual Workers Union 2014). A strong perception emerged that President Khama had turned a blind eye to corrupt senior government officials and to his cabinet ministers. Serious

claims of corruption on the part of Isaac Kgosi, the director general of the dreaded Directorate of Intelligence Services (DIS) appeared in privately-owned newspapers with disturbing frequency. While investigations were undertaken, there seemed to be no political will to prosecute the man who was said to be Khama's closest friend and confidant.

As indicated above, corruption was one of the main issues for the opposition during the elections. Ntuane thus asserted that 'To demonstrate our commitment to good governance and zero tolerance for corruption and abuse of public office, the long overdue law on declaration of assets and liabilities must be enacted. This action will also shield innocent public officers/politicians from often unfounded accusations of looting. In the eyes of the public, the BDP refuses to bring the law because the party is protecting looters' (Ntuane 2015b).

The creation of sustainable employment for young people produced by the education system was noted by Ntuane as critical. He wrote that the 'BCP had the best crafted political message of the preceding elections: the Bring Back Our Jobs idea spoke to every sincere citizen.... Bring Back Our Jobs is viable and must be pursued aggressively by government. The many jobs created by our natural resources in foreign countries must be brought back to ameliorate the situation of thousands of graduates produced by our education system'. As for the plight of the middle class, Ntuane was of the view that:

Yes, we have educated our people and developed a sizeable middle class but aspirational Batswana are growing resentful of being spectators when the economic cake appears to be enjoyed disproportionately by foreign Asians, white South Africans and even our black African brothers. The BDP must sponsor and drive an unapologetic citizen empowerment law that will facilitate participation of our own people in all sectors of the economy including major projects. For instance, an activist Central Committee could have instructed government to ensure that of the 25 billion budgeted for the ongoing Debswana Cut 8 [Diamond] Project, 50% of it be reserved for companies owned by Batswana. The same must apply for all major projects but with vigilance exercised to prevent a revolving door scenario whereby the same faces and names get empowered.

We must explore other ways of further empowering middle class Batswana who should be ambassadors of our educational policies, many having risen from humble beginnings to middle class status within a generation. We must recognise they assist the state by paying taxes, relieving the burden on social services by enrolling in medical aid and sending their children to private schools, among others. For

example, in the case of highly qualified Batswana middle class working overseas why not allow them dual citizenship instead of educating them for the exclusive benefit of the countries where they have opted to live?

(Ntuane 2015b)

To Ntuane it was not unreasonable 'to insist that all foreign business people bidding for government tenders should partner with Batswana on a shareholding basis stipulated by law. We must learn from bold countries like Malaysia, Namibia and others that have introduced stringent measures to alleviate poverty, create wealth and jobs for their people'.

He was also of the view that economic growth in Botswana could be stimulated by reviewing the Bank of Botswana's foreign exchange controls policy 'to limit repatriation of profits accrued by foreign companies working on government tenders. Why should a speculator fly into the country, bid for a government tender worth billions, win it, complete the project, collect his profit and be allowed to repatriate all of it?' he asked. 'Why can't 50% of the profits remain inland? A distinction must be made between genuine foreign investors who actually bring money into the country and speculators who arrive here just to bid for lucrative tenders' (Ntuane 2015b).

Ntuane observed that the BDP suffered a political backlash owing to unfinished mega government projects, while the culprits escaped scot free. Some of the major projects included upgrading of the national stadium in Gaborone, which was meant to capitalise on the hugely popular FIFA World Cup in neighbouring South Africa in 2010. Four years later the stadium was still not finished. Ntuane believed that 'an activist Central Committee must demand accountability and for heads to roll when wasteful expenditure occurs resulting in the nation being short changed'. He also advocated for introduction of a system of executive mayors in urban centres in order to enforce greater accountability and improved service delivery (Ntuane 2015b).

Furthermore, he called for introduction of an aspect of the proportional representation (PR) system in order 'to attain a more inclusive and broader representation of interest groups in the Legislature'. This was an issue Ntuane had raised even before he joined parliament. However, the argument had always been rebuffed by the BDP because the FPTP system benefitted it greatly, with the 2014 elections being a classic example. Again, the maverick Ntuane called for an introduction of political party funding by the state, something he had also advocated even before his days in parliament. He argued that as the majority party, the BDP would benefit the most from such an arrangement.

On electoral reforms we must live with the sober reality that BDP will not rule forever; as indeed no party does. However, my view is we can still retain office for two more terms (10 years) either on our own or in coalition. Should our tenure in power come to an end without having introduced key electoral reforms such as PR and party funding we will go the way of the dodo because the new rulers will have no incentive to oblige us on what we refused to extend to them over the years.

(Ntuane 2015b)

He warned that 'life in opposition for long ruling liberation/independence parties on this continent is traumatic. Once out of power if they don't go extinct like the dodo, they become pale shadows of their once mighty selves. Known examples are the likes of UNIP in Zambia, MPR in Zaire, Basotho National Party, Malawi Congress Party, KANU in Kenya to name but a few'.

On the campaign trail, Ntuane's team held a meeting in late June 2015 in the mining town of Selebi Phikwe. 'Attendants... said the reforms Ntuane is talking about in his campaigns are exactly what the doctor ordered for the party to survive' and that the 'delegates also pledged to support any chairman candidate who aligns to Ntuane's strategy' (Kelebeile 2015).

Although a few other contestants emerged to challenge Ntuane for the position of secretary general of the BDP, they did not have clear campaign issues, let alone a well-articulated manifesto. One commentator who supported Gaotlhaetse Matlhabaphiri against Ntuane, conceded that 'intellectual debates are so foreign to Matlhabaphiri. Actually, before I wrote this piece I surfed the internet in search of any writings from Matlhabaphiri. *Waii*, all I could find was reports of him being a champion for the male circumcision campaign' (Serite 2015). Ntuane's campaign for reforms was given a boost by another party activist, Bugalo Chilume, who wrote five or six lengthy articles in the *Botswana Guardian* strongly arguing for the need to reform the BDP (Chilume 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2015d; 2015e).

Another contestant for the secretary general position, Olebeng Ngwakwena, tried to undermine Ntuane by personalising the issue instead of rebutting his manifesto, saying that 'I have never resigned nor abandoned the BDP to form an opposing political party or joined another political party. I have remained loyal and dedicated to the BDP in times of need and greatest challenges over the years. As such, I have been part of the BDP legacy for life' (*The Telegraph* 2015). In terms of actual issues and policies, he was limited to stating 'there is need to continuously improve and review all policies and laws in order to make them more relevant and effective. Going forward, there is a need for Citizen Empowerment Act, Freedom of Information Act just to mention a few' (*ibid.*).

CHAIRMANSHIP ASPIRANTS AND BIGGIE BUTALE'S  
*100 POINT REFORM AGENDA FOR BDP*

The crowded contest for party chairmanship was characterised by a lack of issues raised by the candidates, some of whom merely levelled accusations of favouritism against the party leadership. Ian Khama's Vice President, Mokgweetsi Masisi, whose name was initially not included, would later enter the competition against Ndelu Seretse, Tebelelo Seretse, Tshekedi Khama, Biggie Butale, Dithapelo Tshotego, Seteng Motalaote and Moemedi Dijeng. 'The charges and counter-charges are flying fast and thick as the race for BDP chairmanship is heating up and candidates are accusing the party leadership of employing dirty tricks in favour of other candidates' (Ontebetse 2015). The candidate alleged to be unfairly backed by the party leadership was the well-resourced Masisi, with claims that the elections were being rigged in his favour (Kavahematui 2015). It was also observed that 'Some political commentators see the congress as singularly crucial because it will make or break Masisi's ambitions. Masisi, who is being accused of namedropping on his campaign trail, told this publication last week that he entered the chairmanship race with his eye on the ultimate prize – the country's presidency' (ibid.). Traditionally, the BDP chairmanship was held by the vice president of the country, and the party has no provision for the position of vice president.

Biggie Butale, parliamentarian for Tati West, was the only aspirant (other than Botsalo Ntuane) who produced a written manifesto to discuss actual policies. Despite its ambitious title, the *100 Point Reform Agenda for BDP*, Butale's manifesto was quite modest and not as far-reaching and ambitious as Ntuane's. The platform, which he argued he would implement in the first 100 days in office if elected, received miniscule media attention and had no positive impact on his campaign (he would suffer a heavy defeat at the hands of Masisi during the election). For that reason we will not dwell much on Butale's manifesto, except to point out that it was clearly in response to the favourable reception that Ntaune's issues-based programme enjoyed. For the first time, there was a degree of competition around policy-based platforms within the BDP. With regard to Butale, Mosikare (2015) noted that 'Some of the reforms he intends to introduce are the introduction of indigenous languages in schools and indigenous radio and television stations'. Advocacy for the country's indigenous or ethnic 'minority' languages through the school system and community radio stations had been strongly opposed by the BDP leadership, on the grounds that it would somehow promote tribal bigotry in the country. The BCP, on the other hand, strongly advocated the promotion of the marginalised indigenous languages, while Ntuane (2015) condemned BCP's advocacy as tribalism in his manifesto and other fora. Although there were

allegations of tribalism in the campaign trail, whereby some delegates were purportedly advised not to vote for a Kalanga (Butale's ethnic group), this does not seem to have been a factor given that Ntuane is also of Kalanga stock and won handsomely.

Butale, who doubled as a church minister, noted that 'the BDP government needs to set up a leadership and good governance centre of excellence that will service the country and the rest of the continent' (Mosikare 2015). He concluded his manifesto with a passage from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now afloat;  
And we must take the current when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures.

However, it should be pointed out that Butale's manifesto appeared only in late June, just a week or so before the election in Mmadinare.

Just like Ntuane, other contestants (including Masisi) were reported to have avoided the tradition of faction lobby lists. However, as election day approached there were media reports that 'While a public impression has been created including selling it to sympathetic media houses that vice president Mokgweetsi Masisi does not have a campaign lobby list, it has since emerged that behind the scenes that list exists and it has widely been circulated to key delegates that will be attending the Botswana Democratic Party Congress in Mmadinare' (*Sunday Standard* 2015). It seems likely that the lack of a manifesto forced Masisi to resort to the tried and tested custom of faction lobby lists.

#### REJECTION OF NTUANE AND HIS REFORM AGENDA

There was informed pessimism about the applicability and potential success of Ntuane's proposed reforms even before the central committee elections in Mmadinare. Possibly the sharpest and most telling was by *Sunday Standard's* deputy editor, Spencer Mogapi, who doubted whether the ultra-conservative and proud BDP hierarchy had the stomach for Ntuane's suggested reforms. Mogapi noted that:

In his treatise – perhaps out of sheer optimism – Ntuane falls prey to exaggerating the BDP's eagerness to reform. Quite rightly he posits

that 'only an open, critical and honest conversation can usher changes that will constitute a Reform Agenda for retaining power in the next polls'. But does the BDP current posture show any appetite for such a far-reaching conversation? Existing signals are not so encouraging. Until recently, the BDP chief rainmaker, President Ian Khama, even refused to accept that the party had suffered any major setback at the polls. President Khama took unkindly to those BDP members who even vaguely made emphasis of popular vote over constituency margins. That on its own is telling; there is a deep reluctance to even start accepting that there are problems. And how do reforms happen when those at the helm do not accept that there is anything wrong in the first instance?

(Mogapi 2015)

Mogapi was disappointed by what he considered to be Ntuane's deliberate avoidance of mentioning that the party had become a 'captured agency' under the current central committee, which he felt was too elitist and materialistic. Mogapi also argued that the current leadership was detached from the rural poor who had for decades been the bedrock of the party's support and electoral success. 'Until the party is rescued from this cartel, even the mouth-watering plethora of reforms suggested by Ntuane will at best seem cosmetic' (Mogapi 2015). He was also of the opinion that Ntuane glossed over the issue of elite corruption. Ntuane did in fact emphasise the need to tackle real and putative corruption, and that may have greatly displeased those in control of the BDP and the state resources that enabled self-enrichment and patronage. Before the 2014 elections, a BDP parliamentarian, Robert Masitara, had waged a spirited campaign against corruption in government-owned enterprises and was rebuffed for 'talking too much' by some elements in the BDP (Manual Workers Union 2014). Masitara was eventually marginalised and lost his Bonnington North constituency in Gaborone to the UDC President in the 2014 elections.

Mogapi's take was that the rural poor had been short-changed by tenderpreneurs in the BDP leadership, as were the party's intellectuals. 'Over the last few years the BDP has become a party of personalities where strongmen outshine institutions. As a result, intellectual capital is one commodity that has significantly lost its premium in the BDP under President Khama. This casts people like Ntuane into a specter of being endangered species. They exist somewhere in the periphery' (Mogapi 2015). The latter point is particularly critical, given what became of Ntuane's reform agenda. Indeed, Mogapi noted presciently that:

By insisting that the coming Congress should be premised on ideas, Ntuane might, not for the first time, be unwittingly placing him[self]

at odds with the strongmen that run the party today. Ntuane says 'the party must lead government and not be subordinate as is the case presently'. Is this a possibility under the current leadership? Is this not a kind of thinking we have heard all over before that once led to some people like Ntuane bolting out of the BDP to form the BMD?

(Mogapi 2015)

In fact, Ntuane's manifesto ideas were not adopted because they were brought forth and promoted by an individual, rather than a faction or a group within the party. Fears clearly emerged that adopting his ideas might overshadow and undermine the position of the party chairman and vice president of the country (i.e. Masisi) who was readying himself to become president by April 2018. This may also explain the bad blood that seemed to exist between the secretary general and the chairman, and the marginalisation of the former. By introducing ideas into the intraparty competition, Ntuane unwittingly threatened to derail the planned smooth transition from Khama to Masisi, and therefore had to be stopped by the BDP leadership. Consequently, there were reports that 'The party fired some of its secretariat staff members, which observers said were given the boot because they were pro-Botsalo Ntuane's reforms' (Dube 2016a). It also appears that both Masisi and Khama had personal antipathy towards Ntuane and were not ready to bury the hatchet because of the key role he played in the split that conceived the BMD in 2010.

However, unlike Masisi, Ian Khama did not display his anti-Ntuane attitude publicly. The obviously deteriorating relationship between Masisi and Ntuane made the adoption and implementation of the reform agenda impossible as personality-driven politics triumphed. This saw the party chairman increasingly marginalising Ntuane, particularly in media briefings where the BDP welcomed defectors from the opposition. When the BCP finally decided to join the UDC, some of its members, who were against the decision, became disgruntled and Masisi personally led their recruitment into the BDP. When these were paraded before the media, Masisi hogged the limelight with Ntuane cutting a lonely figure. His role as secretary general was increasingly performed by a junior party official, further marginalising Ntuane. When asked about this state of affairs Ntuane diplomatically, but unconvincingly, claimed that all was well between him and Masisi. Nevertheless, the rift between the two BDP politicians became irreparable and their lack of cooperation undermined the running of party business. Reported efforts by Ian Khama for conciliation and cooperation, whether genuine or not, proved futile.

In late 2016, the country's constitution was amended to raise the number of specially elected members of parliament (handpicked by the president) from

four to six. Some BDP MPs strongly argued for Ntuane's inclusion, since as their party's secretary general he would also become part of government and possibly influence the implementation of his 'activist central committee' idea. However, under pressure from President Khama, he lost the vote to another BDP member, in fact a defector from the BNF. This development seemed to have sealed his fate in terms of progression in the party and government.

For the political observer Anthony Morima (in an interview with journalist Chakalisa Dube), rivalries and jostling for positions in the post-Khama era might have worked against Ntuane: 'We know that he (Ntuane) has strong political ambitions and there is talk that some within the party leadership, particularly those who are reportedly aligned to the Vice President and party chairperson Mokgweetsi Masisi, fear that if his (Ntuane) reforms are a success he may turn into a star post the Khama era' (Dube 2016b). This lends credence to the conclusion that had the 22 *Discussion Points* been a group or factional platform it would not have been so blatantly and brutally ignored.

#### RETURN TO ISSUELESS AND FACTION-RIDDLED CENTRAL COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

The build-up to the July 2017 central committee election in Tonota was a return to the quintessential faction fighting of the BDP, with issues or ideas playing no role whatsoever. The contest was between Masisi's faction and another led by cabinet minister Nonofho Molefhi. The two factions called themselves *Basisibetsi* and *Banonofhi* to reflect the names of their commanders-in-chief, Masisi and Molefhi respectively (Mmegi 2017). Initial media reports indicated that Molefhi, who was not campaigning on any platform or noticeable ideas, was surging ahead of Masisi in the contest for chairmanship of the party. This particular central committee election was critical because it was linked to the succession to the presidency. Ian Khama's term was ending on 31 March 2018 with the inauguration of his successor scheduled for the following day, 1 April 2018. Masisi was reported to have exploited his incumbency as vice president to compete against Molefhi. Entrepreneurs, whose businesses are dependent on government projects, fund the ruling party and its senior office holders; supporting rivals could face a backlash of lost business. Molefhi's supporters subsequently complained that 'Indian businessmen hide when they see Molefhi' (Lute 2017). Kesitegile Gobotswang (2017), BCP vice president, described the BDP funding by some sections of the Indian business community as 'The Guptarisation of the BDP' after the Indian Gupta family's infamous influence of top South African government and business personalities during the presidency of Jacob Zuma (Myburgh 2017). A University of Botswana-based political critic, Kenneth Dipholo (2015), asserted that 'The BDP is a dyed-in-the-wool mafia organization'.

The 2017 campaign was expensive and Molefhi's faction could not match Masisi's outfit financially, as indicated by a headline in the *WeekendPost* (2017) reading 'Now Molefhi Needs Money'. This only exacerbated the bad blood between the two factions:

The race for the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) chairmanship position is said to be getting uglier each passing day as the two camps are jostling for votes and financiers. The race has pitted the incumbent Vice President Mokgweetsi Masisi and Minister of Infrastructure and Housing Development Nonofho Molefhi. Recently there was scuffle at the Francistown region elections which, according to those who witnessed the events, resulted with members supporting Molefhi's faction beating Masisi's supporters who reported the matter to the police. Masisi, who is alleged to be close to the Director of Directorate of Intelligence Security Services (DISS) Isaac Kgosi, is said to be using the connection to spy on Molefhi. In an interview recently, an MP belonging to Molefhi's camp revealed in confidence that the DISS are tailing their candidate. 'We know that they are now using security agents to spy on our camp and this will not deter us', said the outspoken MP who preferred anonymity. He said one of the reasons that Molefhi and some of his lobby group members are under surveillance is to establish who their financiers are. It was recently revealed that Masisi has the financial backing of the Asian community who have already donated more than P10 million to him. The MP said they have also advised Molefhi to resign from cabinet as they might start sending him to international assignments as way of derailing his campaign.

(Mmeso 2017)

The campaign did, however, have some interesting twists and turns. Ntuane was competing to retain his position as secretary general, but this time he had no discussion points for reform nor any political platform. Like the other candidates he ran an issueless campaign, again standing as an independent after briefly considering joining Molefhi's faction. 'Apparently Ntuane assessed the people that support his man for the chairpersonship of the party, minister Nonofho Molefhi, and came to the conclusion that most are losers', alleged *Mmegi* journalist Tsaona Basimanebotlhe (2017). She continued, 'Some of Molefhi's supporters include the vocal Tebelelo Seretse, assistant minister Biggie Butale and Dikgakgamatso Seretse. The trio stood for the chairpersonship in Mmadinare three years ago and were humiliated by Vice President Masisi. They still have a bone to grind against Masisi and it is believed that Ntuane felt that with the terrible losers in the slate, Molefhi's team is "very weak".'

Veteran factionalist Jacob Nkate joined Masisi's slate as secretary general aspirant, following his stint as Botswana's ambassador to Japan. An interesting twist came when Nkate failed to keep his real motives to himself and declared that he intended to challenge Masisi for the presidency of the BDP in the 2019 central committee election. This careless disclosure led to Masisi instantly dropping him from his list. Traditionally, in the BDP an open expression of ambition for the presidency leads to marginalisation (Makgala 2006). Masisi then replaced Nkate with Mpho Balopi for secretary general, a position he had held before being replaced by Ntuane in 2015. Balopi had become infamous for saying 'it's our turn to eat' when some concerned citizen enquired as to why government tenders were monopolised by BDP-linked businesspeople. This phrase had gained widespread notoriety in Kenya, and indicated pervasive and systemic corruption (Wrong 2014).

Ntuane and Nkate thus became independent candidates without manifestos. It was not long before Ntuane tried preaching unity and peace between Masisi and Molefhe by offering to step down as secretary general and pave the way for Molefhe to succeed him, and thus allow Masisi free passage to the chairmanship. Ntuane's gesture was an exercise in futility as Molefhe focussed only on the chairmanship and nothing less. Although media projections indicated that Ntuane would have a fairly easy victory in Tonota, this was not the case as Masisi and the rest of his faction won easily. As indicated above, the historic BDP presidential election in April 2019 was totally devoid of any articulation of new ideas through manifestos or any other medium. In fact, Masisi's speech was so unoriginal that part of it was plagiarised from a speech once given by Barack Obama, something for which Masisi later apologised.

### THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION

After becoming president in April 2018 Masisi did away with a few of Ian Khama's unpopular programmes, policies and repressive measures, and also started a strong rhetoric against the corruption said to have taken root during Khama's presidency (2008–2018). Masisi also dismissed and ordered the dramatic arrest of the feared DIS director general, Isaac Kgosi, much to the delight and satisfaction of many citizens. It was also claimed that Masisi had reneged on a condition for accepting the vice presidency, that on becoming president he would appoint as his deputy Khama's younger brother and cabinet minister, Tshekedi Khama, ostensibly to perpetuate the Khama's stranglehold on the country's political leadership. These developments brought a sharp rift and bitter public animosity between Khama and Masisi with the former quitting the BDP in May 2019 to campaign for the opposition, and also helped form Botswana Patriotic Front (BFP). The latter drew its support from Khama's tribal territory of Central District

where he is the chief. These developments made some in the private media and independent observers conclude that the 2019 general elections were for the UDC to lose. The UDC's election manifesto was also said to be the most appealing of the main parties.

Nevertheless, the landscape was changing. Khama's dogged determination to undermine and topple Masisi's government, sometimes with the assistance of foreign power brokers or 'mercenaries', coupled with influential international media led to widespread public hostility towards Khama and sympathy for Masisi. Furthermore, Masisi's reforms – his consultative approach, salary increase for members of the armed forces, promise to reinstate some of the medical workers dismissed during BOFEPUSU's 2011 strike, as well as increasing salaries and improving service conditions for lowly-paid government workers just before the elections – endeared him to the trade unions and the affected workers

By contrast, UDC President Duma Boko's ill-advised marginalisation of BOFEPUSU from the UDC worked against the party. He also made a grave strategic error when he defied some party activists and embraced the now loathed Ian Khama, and Isaac Kgosi whom he had previously threatened to arrest for massive corruption and abuse of human rights, if the UDC won state power. This included moving a futile motion of no confidence against Masisi in Parliament, believed to be sponsored by Khama. However, at the time it was not apparent that embracing Khama and having him informally in the UDC campaign trail would backfire. In fact, relentless defections from BDP to BPF and huge crowds which Khama's rallies attracted seemed to make Masisi panic. In late August he openly appealed for Khama to return to the BDP saying that he was loved there while the UDC was merely using him (Mokwena 2019).

Moreover, Boko's crass arrogance, disparaging of opponents (including Masisi) during the country's first televised presidential debate leading to the elections got the better of him and turned many against his party in support of Masisi's BDP. Furthermore, his much-publicised association with international financiers (portrayed by the BDP and media as a mafia whose only interest was siphoning off the country's natural resources) led to a loss of confidence and respect in Boko by some voters. However, to be fair to Boko, the refusal by the BDP government to introduce state funding for political parties would inevitably tempt the opposition to find financial support from any international operator. This concern was also noted by SADC election observers for the 23 October 2019 elections, as compromising Botswana's national sovereignty and security (SADC 2019).

However, Boko's miscalculations and Masisi's popularity led to the BDP retaining power by winning 38 of the 57 parliamentary seats, mostly in the southern part of the country where the UDC had made significant gains in the

2014 elections. UDC won only 15 seats, BFP managed just three while the Alliance for Progressives (BMD's splinter party) salvaged just one seat. The BDP had some 53% of the popular vote while the combined opposition received 47% with the UDC registering 36%.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that none of Ntuane's recommendations were either adopted or implemented was not only a blow to him but also an affront to the many BDP members or delegates who voted for him, convinced by the ideas he had sold to them during the campaign trail. However, eschewing factions, understandably because of their long history of mutual hostility and instability in the party, seems with hindsight to have been a strategic blunder. Ntuane appears to have unwittingly crossed some influential figures within the BDP through his clarion call against elite corruption. His advocacy of an activist central committee had the potential to disrupt entrenched patronage networks that served sectarian and personal interests. An issues-based campaign as proposed by Ntuane was a challenge to those incumbents who profited from the system and who had no wish for new policies that might threaten this cosy arrangement.

The eschewal of factions could in the future lead to many individuals competing for different central committee positions, each having his or her own manifesto and all no doubt based on populist issues such as anti-corruption, employment creation, etc. The experience of Ntuane showed that this would not be tolerated by the BDP leadership. Ntuane's otherwise well-meaning blueprint demonstrated the clear limitations to Africa's 'senior democracy' and revealed that factional personality-driven politics continues to dominate the party culture of the BDP. Rather than address actual issues, the BDP seems content to be mired in factional activities, which in turn perpetuates the system of patronage and even corruption for those in control. The resistance to a manifesto that putatively challenged this state of affairs displayed the entrenched, if not complacent nature of the BDP after fifty years of governing Botswana.

The BDP's triumph in the 2019 elections was in no small measure a result of poor judgement and strategic blunders by Duma Boko of the UDC.

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