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MEETINGS, MINUTES AND THE LIMITS OF PARTICIPATION IN A RURAL WATER PROJECT

Edward Burke



A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg 1998

Abstract

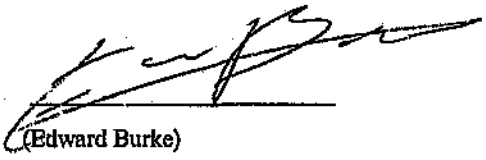
This report investigates participatory development practices through an analysis of a rural water project. The research is based upon data gathered from interviews, written sources, and the author's observations as a consultant on the project. The report critically examines two approaches to development: the modernist approach of the developers, and the critical approach of some anthropologists who view development as a tool for the domination of the Third World. An alternative approach is proposed which is based upon the interaction between the global and the local. This accounts for the role of power in development without reducing development to a strategy in a struggle between the First and the Third World. This framework is used to analyse how different actors in the project understood project meetings quite differently. These understandings shaped the course of the project and have important implications for the adaptation of the village to a global environment.

Keywords:

Absenteeism
Change
Consensus
Development
Globalisation
Meetings
Minutes
Participation
Power
Tswana

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



(Edward Burke)

25th day of February 1998

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people for their help with the research and writing of this report.

My thanks to Professor Robert Thornton, my supervisor, for providing me with the space to work out my own thoughts, while offering occasional insights which encouraged me to look my ideas in new ways.

Thanks also to Graeme Rodgers, who introduced me to Ga-Rasai, generously contributed his thoughts and ideas, and helped me to maintain an open and critical approach to the project.

Tim Hart and Paul Kapelus of Resource Development Consultants provided me with the opportunity of working on the JICA project in Ga-Rasai and gave me a great deal of support. Mpho Moitsiwa of the JICA study team also provided valuable assistance. He was not only an able colleague but also a gifted interpreter and a vital source of information.

The people of Ga-Rasai were very generous and hospitable throughout the course of the project and my research. Christina Madalane was particularly kind to me, welcoming me into her home and inviting me to social events in the village.

I am very grateful to Georgina Guedes for her help in editing the final document.

Finally my mother, Ione Burke, provided me with a great deal of support, both academic and otherwise, throughout the research and writing of this paper. Without her help this would be a much poorer work.

Edward Burke
February 1998

Cover photograph: Mr S Kadowaki, Team Leader of the JICA study team, inspecting a prepayment meter

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1 The study

This study is based on fieldwork which I conducted in the village of Ga-Rasai in the Northwest Province from June to October of 1997. During this period I was employed as a consultant by Resource Development Consultants (RDC) to manage the institutional development aspect of a pilot water project in Ga-Rasai which was funded by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA). When I began work on the project in June 1997 it had been running for some time. It was about half-way through its life-span and most of the planning and some of the implementation had already taken place.

As I worked with the community of Ga-Rasai and the consultants employed by JICA two things began to intrigue me. The first was that virtually everyone involved in the project spoke about community participation as if it were vitally important to the project. As time went on, however, I began to suspect that different people meant different things when they spoke of participation, and with varying degrees of sincerity. I was curious about why participation was so important to the different actors. I then began to ask to what extent the community really did contribute to the conceptualisation and implementation of the project and to investigate how its contribution was limited by both internal and external factors.

The second intriguing aspect of the study, for me, was the way in which the processes of management were conceptualised differently by the different parties. In particular, I was interested in meetings as an institution. Meetings were a central part of the project, but again they did not seem to be understood in quite the same way by all concerned. Nor were everyone's objectives for meetings necessarily congruent. This is intertwined with the question of participation. Meetings were the primary site of community involvement in the planning and implementation of the project, such as it was. They were the primary site for the investigation of participatory processes and group decision-making. In addition, meetings and group decision-making were understood and practised quite differently by the JICA study team, local government and the people of Ga-Rasai. They provided an excellent point for the examination of how different understandings of participation and participatory processes were situated within a field of power which favoured the developers.

The aims of this study, then, are to examine participation and participatory processes in the water project in Ga-Rasai, to analyse how they are understood differently by different parties,

to understand their position within different cultural and historical contexts and their importance in global and local power relations, to identify factors that limit participation, and to determine to what extent the project was in fact participatory.

2 Ga-Rasai

2.1 Location and socio-economic context

Ga-Rasai is situated in the Northwest Province, in a rural area about 70 km from Brits. Access to the village is by 12 km of well-maintained dirt road which links to a tar road from Brits to the nearby Borokolalo game reserve. The countryside is fairly densely populated in the area around Ga-Rasai. There are several other villages nearby, as well as larger settlements such as Jericho and Lethlabile The landscape is hot and dry, green-brown bushveld occasionally broken by the lush cultivated fields of white-owned farms. Ga-Rasai's location relative to the major centres is shown in the area map in Appendix 4.

There are about 165 households in Ga-Rasai. The population is estimated at about 600 people but it varies greatly as many people work away from the village, primarily in Brits, Johannesburg and Pretoria, and are absent from Ga-Rasai for long periods of time. The official population, according to the chairman of the Community Authority, stands at over 1000, but this figure does not distinguish between *de jure* and *de facto* residents. Virtually everyone in the village speaks seTswana as their first language.

There is little infrastructure in the village. There are no telephones and very few of the houses have electricity. Before the arrival of the JICA study team the Community Authority had been trying for years to have electricity installed at the Community Authority offices.

Family incomes in Ga-Rasai are comparatively low but there is very little evidence of abject poverty. The houses are well-built, most have pit latrines installed by the Mvula Trust. The village has a crèche and a primary school. A clinic is currently under construction.

There are very few opportunities for employment in or near the village, most working people either commute to or live in one of the closer urban centres. Comparatively few families use the village land for agricultural purposes. Most rely on income from family members working in the urban areas for their subsistence.

2.2 Governance

Most of the present inhabitants of Ga-Rasai are descended from the original families who moved to the area about two generations ago. These families purchased two farms under communal title and founded the village of Ga-Rasai.

Prior to 1991, the village fell under the tribal authority located in the nearby town of Jericho. However the residents of Ga-Rasai were unhappy with this situation, primarily because they felt that the village did not derive any benefit from the money collected by the tribal authority. Consequently the village applied to the Bophuthatswana government for political autonomy and a Community Authority was established.

The Community Authority is comprised of members of the families who own the title deeds to the land upon which the village is built. It is generally agreed that only members of these families are eligible to serve on the Community Authority.

The Community Authority has changed very little since it was established. In fact this has become a major source of tension in the village. A number of residents claimed that the Community Authority's term of office was only 5 years, and that it was overdue for re-election. According to one resident, "the contract of the Community Authority has expired". Recent allegations of corruption have further weakened its legitimacy. In particular, it has been accused of misappropriating income from the village's lucrative hunting business, whereby hunters pay large amounts of money to shoot antelope on village land. This has become a major bone of contention in the village and has been the subject of many bitter disputes, often organised along the lines of kinship-based factions.

Broader changes in local and national government have raised further questions regarding the mandate and legitimacy of the Community Authority. These include the election of the ANC-led government in 1994 which has placed emphasis on democracy, transparency and participation in governance, the dissolution of the Bophuthatswana homeland government, and the restructuring of local government following the local government elections of November 1995.

These events have left the Community Authority in an ambiguous position. The Chairman of the Community Authority stated that he was not sure if the Community Authority was regarded as local government or not. He thought that it was part of local government, because it was "registered", but could not be sure if this still applied under the new system. According

to the Eastern District Council, the government body responsible for the administration of the area, the Community Authority has no formal status.

Under the new local government system the village itself does not have an elected representative in government. A councillor named Mr Nana was elected to represent a wide area of which Ga-Rasai is only a small part. However the new local government is located in Brits, which is relatively far from Ga-Rasai.

The isolation of the village and the limited capacity of the Eastern District Council have meant that the Community Authority remains the only real source of political power in Ga-Rasai. The Community Authority still controls the hunting, oversees various committees, and resolves disputes (although perhaps not significantly more than it creates). Its critics have yet to propose a viable alternative for village government and the Eastern District Council is not well positioned to take this role. It has proven difficult to involve the District Council in the administration of Ga-Rasai. Even when meetings have been arranged with the District Council at Ga-Rasai, the members of the Eastern District Council have usually neglected to attend.

2.3 Sources of water

Households in Ga-Rasai obtain water from a variety of sources. The significance of these has been affected by changes in infrastructure and water quality.

2.3.1 Water supply in Ga-Rasai prior to 1996

2.3.1.1 *Hand-pump operated boreholes*

Under the authority of the Bophuthatswana government a number of boreholes were sunk in Ga-Rasai and hand pumps were installed. This system was maintained by the Bophuthatswana government and became the principal source of water for residents of Ga-Rasai.

The boreholes do not adequately meet the needs of the village. There are too few boreholes in the village and drawing water is a laborious task. In addition tests have shown that the water from one of the boreholes contains an unacceptably high level of nitrates, according to Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) standards.

2.3.1.2 Purchases of river water

Some residents of Ga-Rasai supplemented their household water supply with purchases of river water. This water was collected by other residents who used donkey carts to transport the containers from the Moretele River to the village.

Generally residents did not use river water for consumption as it was well-known that the quality of this water was poor. Residents did, however, use it for activities such as washing clothes which required relatively large amounts of water.

This practice now seems to have ended as the reticulated water system provides a cheaper and easier, if somewhat unreliable, alternative.

2.3.1.3 Rain water collection

Due to the shortage of water and the relatively heavy labour required to obtain it, many people have installed systems for collecting rain water. In most cases run-off from corrugated iron roofs is channelled into containers.

As the roofs are not clean, water collected using this method is not considered fit for human consumption.

2.3.2 The implementation of a reticulated water system in Ga-Rasai

In 1996 a reticulated water system was designed and implemented in Ga-Rasai by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry under the RDP. This system drew water from the Moretele River, about two kilometres from the village. It was piped to a filtration plant (supplied by Aquatech) near the village, and then reticulated to twenty one standpipes in the village for household use. The construction was carried out using the community's labour and took place in the winter of 1996.

2.3.2.1 Initial problems with the reticulation system

In the months following the installation of the new system, a number of technical problems became apparent. The primary reason for these was that the water purification system is fairly sophisticated, while the levels of technical expertise in the village are comparatively low. The system was prone to breakdowns as there were numerous places where problems

could occur and even minor problems could cripple the system for days. These might include pump breakdowns, leaking pipes, shortages of chemicals for purification, or any number of other difficulties. To make matters worse only the bare minimum of training was provided to the operators of the diesel pump and the filtration plant. The filtration plant operator, Oriah Manamela, claims that he was given an hour or two of training on a Friday afternoon. Magalies Water, the water board which is responsible for supplies and maintenance, disputes this, but it is clear that the training that was provided was insufficient and inappropriate. Further training was promised but never materialised.

These problems were compounded by difficulty in accessing support. There are no telephones in the village, and Magalies Water made little effort to provide prompt and reliable service.

In order to recover the running costs of supplying water, each household was expected to pay a fixed monthly charge which was set by the village Water Committee and approved at community meetings. This would cover the operators' salaries, chemicals for the filtration plant, diesel for the pump and so on. Needless to say, in spite of various different formulae for payment (R10 per household per month, R5 per adult per month, etc.), payment was not forthcoming as the basic problems remained the same – the quality and reliability of the water supply were disputed and it was not possible to enforce payment.

3 The project

3.1 JICA's study on the expansion of capacity of Magalies Water

In February 1997 a team of Japanese and South African consultants employed by JICA, Japan's international aid agency, selected Ga-Rasai as the site for a pilot project. This was to comprise part of the team's broader programme of expanding the capacity of Magalies Water, assisting it to adapt to the changing circumstances of service provision in South Africa.

According to the White Paper on Water Supply and Sanitation Policy (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 1994: 27), "Water Boards were established to supply bulk water for industrial or municipal use within an area determined by the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry. In future Water Boards will be charged with fulfilling an appropriate role in the provision of services to all communities in their service areas."

This means that in addition to its role as a bulk water provider, Magalies Water now has to provide support and training to local structures in areas where provision of water is managed locally. As a result it is responsible for the provision of services to far more consumers than before, and it must extend completely new services to many of these consumers. It must also take community participation into account and learn to deal with the intricacies of community politics.

At the same time, "Water Boards will continue to function as independent financial entities on a break-even basis. This is important to ensure that they operate efficiently and effectively." Therefore Magalies Water is expected not only to extend the range and coverage of its services but also to recover the costs of doing so.

The JICA project was intended to help Magalies Water to adapt to fulfil the role envisioned for it. The programme was initiated in 1996 with the formulation of a master plan for the extension of capacity of Magalies Water which detailed a strategy up to the year 2011. The ultimate objective of the whole programme is to extend access to a safe and reliable water supply to all inhabitants in the Magalies Water supply area. This area is shown in the map in Appendix 4.

The pilot projects were an important component of JICA's aid to Magalies Water. As Magalies Water has little experience in supplying historically black areas, the pilot projects were designed as case studies of the issues involved in supplying water to these areas. They were intended to provide lessons for the planning and implementation of similar projects on a much larger scale. Four areas were selected: Sehoko, a rural village on the northern fringe of the former Kwandebele; Kameelboom, a rural settlement comprising three communities north of the Pilanesburg mountains; Bapong, a more populous peri-urban settlement near Brits; and Ga-Rasai. Each of the projects presented different challenges regarding water supply, and the JICA study team's successes and failures in responding to these would inform Magalies Water's future programming.

3.2 The Ga-Rasai pilot project

In February 1997, when JICA first took an interest in Ga-Rasai, the situation was as described above. The water reticulation system had been installed and was operational but it was plagued by problems. The study team undertook to solve these problems by making any technical and institutional changes necessary to improve the quality and reliability of the

water supply, improve linkages with Magalies Water and local government, and facilitate payment for water. A critical path for the project can be found in Appendix 3.

The study team's first step was to meet with the Community Authority and asked it to set up a Project Steering Committee (PSC), also called the Local Project Steering Committee (LPSC), which would work with the study team to address these problems. It was decided, and the manner of deciding such questions will be further analysed in following chapters, that the problem of payment would be best solved by implementing a prepayment system.

The prepayment system that was selected was owned by a company called Bambamanzi. It was based on the use of tokens containing microchips which would be programmed at a central computer and read by electronic meters at each of the standpipes. If this worked, and barring illegal connections, it would indeed solve the problem of non-payment. However it immediately added a further level of technological sophistication to an already overly complex system.

The JICA team decided that the solution to this was to build local capacity. Someone must be trained to administer the system, and to operate and maintain the computer and the standpipes. Training was also to be provided for the pump operator and the filtration plant operator. The community's capacity to manage the system was also to be enhanced through the development of effective management processes and systems.

In order to support all of these interventions and to make them sustainable, the JICA team undertook to improve the linkages between the village, the Eastern District Council and Magalies Water by engaging them in the process of planning and implementation.

This is more or less how the JICA team would describe the project. It was seen primarily in technical terms, with little attention paid to power relations between or within the different parties, or to cultural context. In the following chapters I will argue that this was not the only way of looking at the project. In fact this view was essentially strategic in that it highlighted the aspects of the project which the study team considered important and obscured the way in which the study team used its dominant position in the project in order to fulfil its own agenda. This had real ramifications for the nature and outcomes of the project.

I also found it interesting that the study team and Magalies Water, as well as the technical contractors, continually blamed the problems with the water system upon factors such as capacity in the village and ignorant and lazy villagers. However it seemed to me that if blame

were to be attributed, much could be laid at the door of the developers, who motivated people and then failed to help them reach their goals, and raised expectations but did not fulfil their promises.

For example, in trying to cut corners and failing to meet project deadlines, the contractor responsible for construction jeopardised the entire project. At one point progress was delayed because, instead of redrilling a number of rubber washers, the contractor simply gave the local plumber the washers and a drill bit so that he could drill them manually. Without a drill the drill bit simply stretched the washers and the hole remained too small. As a result the washers constricted the flow of water. This delayed progress for several days. Similarly, poor supervision of the construction of meter housings meant that they all had to be altered to accommodate the meters. This delayed the project further.

This sort of inefficiency had a number of consequences. It delayed the project schedule, which meant that the system could not be properly tested before the end of the project when the study team disbanded. It endangered the fragile trust built up with the village, which had little reason to accept the promises of outsiders. In doing so it dampened the enthusiasm of the community for the project and threatened the project's acceptance. It also interfered with the Water Committee's cash flow. The Committee had made promises to the operators and the administrative clerk that their salaries would be paid on a regular basis. These promises were based upon he assumption that payment would be forthcoming for water during September and October. As this was not the case, the Committee was not able to meet all of its costs on time and drained the few resources that it had. The trust fostered between the employed staff and the committee was damaged and the committee's already fragile financial position was weakened further.

3.3 The Water Committee and the Project Steering Committee

The Project Steering Committee was created by the Community Authority at the request of the study team. The Water Committee was formed about a year before, also by the Community Authority, at the request of the contractors responsible for supplying the reticulated water system to Ga-Rasai. Both fell under the Community Authority, along with a number of other bodies such as the school committee and the gravediggers.

The Water Committee and the PSC were composed of a fairly even mix of men and women, most of whom were unemployed or retired. As the people who were placed on these committees tended to be those with little else to do, they were probably not the most

competent, dynamic people in the village. This was particularly true of the younger men. I was told on a number of occasions that if so-and-so was competent and reliable he would be in town working rather than hanging around in the village.

The JICA study team carried out only a day or so of initial research before beginning its operations. Unfortunately it did not discover that the Water Committee already existed in the village before requesting the creation of a PSC. It also left it to the village to determine the precise nature of the PSC. As a result, conflict immediately developed between the PSC and the Water Committee about who was responsible for which aspects of water management and who was to report to whom.

This turned out to be an ongoing argument which was never really resolved, despite a number of attempts to combine the two into a single body. Particularly during the early stages of the project, before I joined the study team, this made it very difficult to make any progress as every meeting returned to the same dispute. Later the dispute was largely ignored and "the committee" was used to refer to whoever happened to be in attendance on any given day. In fact this was not even limited to the Water Committee and the PSC as members of the RDP Forum (created by yet another RDP-related body, I was never able to ascertain which one) and the Community Authority, as well as a few other interested observers, were also included among those in attendance. However the dispute was raised again on a number of occasions when contested issues arose, particularly those relating to the allocation of resources.

As I shall argue in Chapter 4 this is not an unusual state of affairs in Tswana politics. It is rooted in cosmological understandings and political practices which date back to precolonial times.

3.4 Meetings

Central to the institutional and infrastructural aspects of the project was the importance of consultative meetings regarding planning and implementation. Monthly meetings were held with the Project Execution Forum which included a host of consultants and contractors as well as representatives from Magalies Water, a number of government bodies, and the communities. Site meetings were held regularly with the contractors, and planning meetings with the institutional consultants. Each of the parties held irregular meetings with one another, and the members of each party held meetings between themselves. If I had attended all of the meetings that I was invited to I am convinced that I would have had time for nothing else.

The meetings that I attended most regularly were weekly meetings with the Water Committee, the Project Steering Committee and a few members of other community bodies who took an interest in the project.

These meetings took place in the community hall in Ga-Rasai for the first couple of months of my work there. Thereafter they were moved to a disused schoolroom nearby, I suspect as a result of a dispute between Peter Tlale, the Chairperson of the Community Authority and Oriah Manamela, the Chairperson of the Water Committee. I would arrive every Thursday at around ten o'clock in the morning, as people were beginning to trickle towards the patch of dusty ground in front of the community buildings. When most people were present we would move inside where the meeting would open with a prayer and a hymn.

A great deal of attention was paid to the formal elements of the meeting. The meeting structure was introduced by the study team prior to my arrival and enthusiastically adopted by the committees. Each meeting had an agenda, usually drawn up by myself, and minutes were taken, also by myself. An analysis of a set of minutes can be found in Appendix 1.

At the beginning of each meeting R D Tlale, the Chairperson of the PSC, would welcome everybody and proceed to read the minutes, "without any waste of time". The committee members would then carefully scrutinise the minutes for errors, paying more attention to dates, the spelling of names, and so on, than to the actual content. Then any adjustments were made and the minutes were accepted. In theory we would then proceed systematically through the items on the agenda. In practice this rarely happened as discussions would lead from one issue to another with frequent and often quite unruly debates, few resolutions, and little attention to the agenda structure. Occasionally someone would refer back to the agenda but it was very difficult to keep to the schedule that was planned for the meeting. Nevertheless, the formal meeting structure, especially the taking of minutes and at least the existence of an agenda, was taken very seriously by the committee members.

A few influential individuals, including Manamela and the Tlales, tended to dominate the discussions. On the whole men spoke more than women, although there were exceptions. Some people attended the meetings nearly every week but said scarcely a word in all the time that I worked in Ga-Rasai. Mpho Moitsiwa, a member of the JICA study team, and I also played an important role in the proceedings.

During the meeting people would occasionally leave the room to smoke a cigarette or to stretch their legs. Others would wander in on occasion to observe the proceedings. As the day wore on and the midday sun heated the tin roof of the building people would tire, issues would be resolved more quickly, and the meeting would be brought to a close with a second prayer.

The ostensible purpose of these meetings was to engage members of the community in the planning and implementation of the project, as well as to discuss progress with them, to ascertain the villagers' needs, and to develop capacity for water management. In the following chapters I shall argue that there was in fact little commitment on the part of the study team to engaging community members in planning and implementation. The team was primarily concerned with ensuring the community's co-operation and commitment while minimising its influence over the project. In addition it was not at all clear that the purpose of the meetings was agreed upon by all of the parties involved in the process. In fact it seems likely that most of the committee members had entirely different reasons for participating in the meetings.

In large part this was because the study team's understanding of meetings had fairly little in common with that of the people of Ga-Rasai. The meetings held by the study team were very different from those held in Ga-Rasai in terms of both the purpose and the processes of group decision-making.

4 Analysis

4.1 Research approach and sources of data

My research was primarily based upon my role as a consultant to JICA. This could be seen as a type of participant observation, for I was participating in the project while observing the processes for JICA and for the purposes of this study. However it should be noted that while I was participating and observing I was doing so as a central actor, not merely as a researcher. This limited my ability to do research for its own sake. It also meant that I had an interest in the project as a stakeholder and was viewed by the other people involved in the project, both the developers and the people of Ga-Rasai, as a role-player and therefore an interested party. Nevertheless, I have tried to maintain an open and critical mind in my analysis of the project. I feel that any partiality that might result from my role is outweighed by the insight that my close involvement with the project afforded me.

My participation in the project took place in the meetings described above and in informal visits to Ga-Rasai to help with the implementation of the water system, as well as in liaison with other parties including Magalies Water, the Eastern District Council, various contractors and service providers and the rest of the study team. I was also involved in designing management instruments (plans, financial accounts and so on) and in contributing to the reports that were submitted to JICA.

In addition to the data that I derived from my involvement in the project, I also had access to a number of other sources of information. I carried out informal and semi-structured interviews with a number of residents of Ga-Rasai, both committee members and ordinary consumers of water. I also conducted informal interviews with study team members.

I made use of a number of written sources in conducting the study. In addition to my own research I had access to research carried out by Graeme Rodgers, who held my position in the project until I took over in June 1997. This was very useful in introducing me to the socio-political context of the project.

Project documents helped to familiarise me with the institutional context and the way the consultants liked to present their understanding of the project. As the broader project of which the pilot study was a part was initiated in early 1996, a fairly large amount of material was produced which indicated the consultants' assessment of the needs of the area, the objectives of the project and its perceived progress. This material includes situational analyses, progress reports and numerous critical paths.

Government documents, such as policy frameworks (ANC 1994) and white papers (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 1994, 1997), were useful in setting the context of national water management.

Finally a great deal of academic writing has been produced on participation and development in general (Escobar 1984, 1991, 1995a, 1995b; Oakley 1991; Mosse 1994) and on decision-making among the Tswana in particular (Kuper 1970, 1971; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; Schapera 1943). These were very useful in providing a theoretical framework for the study of water management in Ga-Rasai.

4.2 Constraints

There were a number of constraints upon my role both as a study team member and as a researcher. My primary constraint was that I do not speak seTswana. This was occasionally a problem as I was not able to catch the nuances of some arguments and discussions. Familiarity with seTswana would have allowed me a far better understanding of the dynamics of the interaction between the committee members. Fortunately most of the committee members were reasonably fluent in English, and English was used predominantly in most meetings. In addition a seTswana-speaking member of the JICA study team was present at most meetings and was able to translate for me. I am aware, however, that these are poor substitutes for proficiency in the local language.

Time was a major constraint on my research in Ga-Rasai. My time was limited and I was expected to spend most of it engaging in project-related activities. As a result I could not examine the political divisions and conflicts within the village as much as I would have liked. This was not strictly necessary for the analysis presented here, but it would have been interesting to trace the links between conflicts within the committees and power relations in the wider community.

The focus of my study limited my investigation into how this project was situated within the national and international context of development. This relates in particular to the effects of larger global power relations on the project and the role of such projects in reproducing these power relations. To some extent I was able to analyse these issues in my study of the relations between different parties and the way the project was conducted, particularly with regard to the nature of participation within the project. However the scope of my research did not allow me to fit this into a broader study of international development in South Africa.

Finally I should note that I joined the project late and consequently took a relatively small role in its design. At times this has been frustrating as the rationale behind the project was fully developed before I became involved. This limited my familiarity with the context of design, my ability to contribute to shaping the project and the extent to which I can learn from it. On the other hand it does have the benefit of allowing me some critical distance. As I do not feel the sense of ownership that I might had I actually designed the project, I am perhaps more free to criticise it. This is an ironic parallel to the instrumentalist approaches to participatory development that are discussed in Chapter 3, whereby local people are encouraged to participate in order to foster local commitment to the project.

4.3 The limits of participation

Community participation seemed to me to be a central aspect of the JICA project in Ga-Rasai. It was emphasised in one way or another by each of the parties involved in the project. However there were real limits to the extent that the people of Ga-Rasai were able to participate in the planning and implementation of the project.

In the following chapters I will analyse how participation was conceptualised by the different parties and situate it within a number of historical, cultural and political contexts. This will illuminate why it was such an important factor and why it was not always evident in practice.

Participation was limited at a number of levels. Firstly it was constrained by the global context of power relations which favour First World 'developers' over Third World 'beneficiaries' of development. Within this context First World attitudes and assumptions predominate and those of the underdeveloped are subordinated and obscured. The developers cast themselves as experts with specialist knowledge which is essential to the development process, thus effectively undervaluing local input and excluding local people from participating in crucial aspects of their own development.

In addition, local views on both development and participatory decision-making are likely to be different from those of the developers. This was certainly the case in Ga-Rasai, where the participatory aspect of participatory decision-making was more important to the villagers than the decision-making, whereas the developers focussed on decision-making over participation. Effectively, both believed that they were talking about the same things but their understandings and objectives were somewhat different. As a result the developers tightened their control over the project in order ensure that their own objectives were realised.

Finally, there were real constraints at the local level regarding the extent of community participation in the project. Although the developers' interest in decision-making should be problematised, there is certainly a need for decisions to be made in any such project. I shall argue that local processes are not well suited to effective decision-making and they are becoming less and less appropriate as the wider context within which Ga-Rasai is situated demands more decisions to be made more quickly at the village level. Effective decision-making is also hobbled by the deep political divisions within the village.

Shortage of organisational and technical capacity is a further problem for the village. Outside pressures have forced Ga-Rasai to adopt a fairly sophisticated water supply system.

Unfortunately there is little base of skills or experience in the village for the operation and management of such a system. Although I agree that the idea of outside 'experts' is problematic, there is also a real need for outside experience in such a project.

It would be inaccurate and unfair to paint the developers as self-interested ogres, as some anthropologists might. I believe that on the whole most of the people involved in the project had a real interest in helping the people of Ga-Rasai. I also believe, however, that the developers had their own agendas which were not necessarily congruent with those of the villagers. These were based to a large extent on global relations of power of which they might not even have been aware. In this study I shall investigate both the power relationships which impacted upon participation and the real shortcomings of the processes that exist at the village level, while trying to avoid both the strict rejectionist approach of many 'anthropology of development' writers, who tend to reduce development to a First World strategy for the domination of the Third World, and the modernist attitudes favoured by the developers.

I feel that a more fruitful approach is to analyse the project as a complex interplay between the global and the local. Global power relations are only one aspect of this relationship. Ga-Rasai is a locality which is becoming more and more interconnected with a global environment. This wider context continues to exert new pressures and demands upon local structures and resources, and at the same time presents new opportunities of all sorts to the people of Ga-Rasai. Infrastructural development, increasing population densities, widening social networks and greater penetration of local government, as well as increasing competition for resources including clean water, all contribute to a situation in which Ga-Rasai is becoming more integrated with the outside world than it ever has been. These changes demand corresponding changes of attitudes and approaches within the village. At the same time Ga-Rasai continues to exist, both for its inhabitants and for outsiders, as a distinct locality. The JICA project can be seen as yet another site of the interaction between local and global interpretations of the world, and the adaptation of global ideas and processes to the local environment, and of local conceptions and approaches to the global.

5 Structure of the paper

In Chapter 2 I review some of the recent critiques of development which seek to understand development within an international framework of power. These critiques are put forward by writers who question the motivations behind development programming and examine its role in reinforcing global inequalities. Their arguments illuminate some of the assumptions and approaches which underpin the project and are useful in problematising my own position in

the project, although I do not feel that they entirely explain the nature of the project in Ga-Rasai.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I examine the significance of participation for the different parties involved in the project. Chapter 3 concentrates on the importance of participation in international and national discourse. In this chapter I am concerned with the strategic importance of participation for developers, the cultural and historical forces which shaped its specific character at a national level, and its position in the power relations of development. In taking this approach I build upon some of the arguments presented in Chapter 2. However I reject a model of development based simply upon domination and resistance in favour of one based on interaction between the global and the local which includes, but is not reduced to, the relationship of power between the First and Third World.

Chapter 4 examines the local historical and cultural factors which have shaped the meaning of participation in Ga-Rasai itself. Here I introduce some of the key concepts which underlie participation and decision-making at the local level, including consensus, the search for solidarity, the factional nature of local politics and the strategic use of absenteeism.

Chapter 5 examines the power relations within the project in the light of the previous chapters. It is informed by the arguments presented in Chapter 2 but it is primarily concerned with the micro-politics of the project: the developers' objectives and the strategies used by the developers to maintain control over the project in order to obtain these objectives.

In Chapter 6 I investigate the local significance of meetings and how local approaches to meetings differed from those of the study team. I suggest that local decision-making processes are primarily concerned with consensus-building. This was overlooked by the study team, which was concerned primarily with decision-making for action. However it had a major impact upon the course of the project. I move on to investigate what prompted individuals to participate in meetings. The answer, I suggest, lies as much in individual self-interest as in a concern for the good of the village.

I conclude in Chapter 7 by drawing together the main points of my argument, seeking a broader understanding of participation which includes the viewpoints of both the study team and the people of Ga-Rasai, and looking at what the future might hold for the water system and for the village itself, as it continues to adapt to the changing demands of its environment.

Chapter 2: Problematising development

1 Discourse and development

In my analysis of the JICA project in Ga-Rasai I found that it was impossible to understand the dynamics of the project without examining the power relations which underpinned it. I also noted, however, that the study team seldom discussed the political aspects of the project. The relationship of power between the developers and the people of Ga-Rasai was never analysed. Even the political implications of the project within the village were rarely mentioned.

This chapter reviews some recent writing on the politics of development. A number of writers have argued that development should be viewed as a discourse which allows the First World to construct the Third World in ways which favour the global balance of power. Their arguments cast light on both the relationship between development and global power relations and the tendency of developers to gloss over questions of power. They provide a valuable starting point for an analysis of power in development.

These writers argue that development is used to define the Third World as abnormal, in opposition to the 'normal' First World. This is supported by scientific discourse which undermines the value of local knowledge and skills and excludes local input. At the same time the political implications of development are concealed within language that is technical and apparently apolitical. The Third World requires the assistance of the First World to develop useful skills and knowledge and become 'normal'. In this way the dependency of the Third World on the First World is maintained and First World states are able to intervene in the affairs of Third World states.

These arguments provide a basis for understanding the global power relations which underlie development, and represent a powerful critique of development itself. They also help to problematise my own position as a researcher. However they have a number of limitations both as an attack on development in general and as a theoretical framework for a local-level study. Most importantly they do not adequately address the difficulties involved in helping local people to survive and compete within a global environment. This requires a more complex understanding of the relationship between the global and the local.

1.1 Knowledge and power

Escobar (1995b) argues that the discourse and practice of development create the Third World. Through development the Third World is constructed in terms which favour the First World and reinforce its dominant position in the field of global power relations. Escobar and writers such as Mitchell (1995) and Crush (1995) are intent on turning conventional development thinking around. Rather than viewing the problems of the Third World as arising internally, and seeking solutions externally in development programming, they suggest that development is the problem and that solutions must be derived locally.

These critiques owe a great deal to the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault is primarily concerned with the use of power in the modern state. He argues that the exercise of power in this context is based principally upon the use and organisation of knowledge (1970:6). Through the use of scientific discourse of categorisation and classification, dominant groups construct other groups, whose ideas and viewpoints they find threatening, in such a way that they are marginalised and silenced. This is done through a process of objectification and subjectification. These groups are analysed and categorised. The aspects which make them different are pathologised as abnormalities. Then they are encouraged to internalise the dominant viewpoint, to see themselves as 'abnormal', for only by recognising their abnormality can they ever become normal.

The power to define what is normal, then, translates into direct control over people. It defines what behaviour is acceptable, how people are viewed by society, and how people view themselves. Through definition and categorisation, truth is determined and the world is organised in a way which favours the powerful. The struggle for truth is the struggle for power (Foucault 1980a:132).

Through the definition of the normal and the abnormal, and the supporting practices of surveillance and discipline (Foucault 1975:195) and scientific examination (Foucault 1980b:202), potentially threatening individuals and groups are controlled, managed, and even recreated to support the "regime of truth" (Foucault 1980a:131).

Escobar argues that similar processes take place on a global scale. The nature of global power relations changed fundamentally after 1945, with the breakdown of colonialism and the beginning of the Cold War. Most of the period since the Second World War has been characterised by conflict between the First World and the Second World, with the Third

World freed from the ties of colonialism to play an increasingly important role in forming alliances with one or other side.

In the post-war period the power of science seemed almost limitless, as did the abilities of the Western states both to improve their own situations and to encourage the same sorts of progress in other, less fortunate, countries. The price of this, for the poor countries of the Third World, was intervention by the First World in their affairs. However, Escobar argues that this price was higher than it seemed, "Behind the humanitarian concern and the positive outlook of the new strategy, new forms of power and control, more subtle and refined, were put into operation" (1995b:386).

According to Escobar and others (Escobar (1984, 1995a), Shrestha (1995), Mitchell (1995)), development is part of a global system of domination over the Third World states by the First World. As Foucault argues regarding power relations within modern states, this is characterised by the production of truth, giving importance to certain kinds of knowledge and undermining others. Here too control lies in the creation of abnormalities -- the poor, the malnourished, the illiterate, pregnant women, and so on. Like the sexual abnormalities identified by Western psychiatry (Foucault 1980b), such abnormalities are actually created through the process of examination, classification and treatment which is ostensibly intended to eradicate them. Development discourse creates the Third World as other, as inferior, as requiring development. Development itself creates the need for development.

1.2 Modernisation

The discourse of development is rooted in the ideas of modernity and modernisation, and this continues to define much development practice today. The modernist conception of development is based on the assumption of an evolutionary model of social development. According to this model the Third World is lagging behind the First World in economic and technological progress and must be helped to 'catch up'. This 'catching up' must involve adoption by the Third World of the social aspects of the First World which are seen to underlie the First World's economic and technological success. Modernism and modernity are inextricably tied up with the "radically transformed character of life under capitalism most clearly visible in the great European and American cities of the 19th and early 20th centuries" (Hebdige 1994:223). The Third World, then, must adopt the values and aspirations of the First World, as well as just its technology, in order to emerge from poverty and stagnation. In order to compete in the international arena the Third World must play the First World at its own game, a game the Third World has little hope of winning.

Development is framed in scientific discourse and based on the ideals of scientific progress. Science is conceptualised as a universal system of knowledge which is value-free, applicable to any situation, and divorced from any context. Foucault and others have criticised this approach, arguing that scientific conception and practice is inherently bound up with Western thought and relationships of power (Foucault 1980:112). Developers have based much of their work on the assumption that scientific knowledge and Western modes of thought can simply be imparted to ignorant locals who have no relevant knowledge and techniques of their own. Science assumes that techniques and knowledge can be alienated from the individual with whom they are associated, and that they are universally valid. This assumption is not universal. Comaroff & Comaroff (1992:248) describe how the Tswana, when they first came into contact with missionaries, were impressed by the productivity of the missionaries' garden plots. Instead of seeing this as proof of the value of industry and European methods (as the missionaries intended), they saw it as proof of the potency of the Europeans. This would not occur in Ga-Rasai today but it indicates that scientific knowledge is itself based on a certain worldview and is not necessarily easily transferable to people in other societies.

The native mind is conceptualised, in the modernist development paradigm, as a *tabula rasa* or, worse, cluttered by the cultural impediments of local knowledge. Only through the rejection of inferior local methods and conceptions and the adoption of 'modern' ones can progress be achieved.

In this way development casts local knowledge and culture as inferior to imported knowledge and culture. The stress on scientific knowledge amounts to a denial of the value of alternative systems of knowledge and an attack on cultural diversity, and results in the "loss of vernacular spaces" (Watts 1993:260). More than this, the idea of an inferior local culture allows the First World to blame the Third World for its own problems.

> "Development discourse wishes to present itself as a detached centre of rationality and intelligence. The relationship between West and non-West will be constructed in these terms. The West possesses the experience, technology and management skills that the non-West is lacking. This lack is what has caused the problems of the non-West. Questions of power and inequality, whether on the global level of international grain markets, state subsidies, and the arms trade, or the more local level of landholding, food supplies and income distribution, will nowhere be discussed." (Mitchell 1995:156)

The Third World's problems are considered to stem from a shortage of useful skills and knowledge. They are described symptomatically as overpopulation, poor education, antiquated farming methods, political instability, corrupt government, inferior healthcare, outdated water supply, and so on. They are seen to be caused by internal factors, and the effects of the power relations which underlie development are concealed.

Certainly local skills and knowledge were given little value in the Ga-Rasai project. There was no attempt to understand or build upon local knowledge or technology. The JICA study team, Magalies Water personnel and the contractors treated the people of Ga-Rasai as though they possessed no useful knowledge apart from the bits and pieces that they may have picked up from working in and visiting the more 'advanced' urban areas. It was the responsibility of the people involved in 'developing' Ga-Rasai to provide the locals with new techniques, understandings and technology which would allow them to manage their lives in a better, more rational, more 'progressive' manner. There was never any suggestion that the villagers might have been able to contribute any useful knowledge to the process, beyond informing the developers of the context of development.

1.3 Strategies of domination

Escobar (1984:387-8) identifies three major strategies whereby the (predominantly First World) practitioners of development maintain their hegemony over the (predominantly Third World) subjects of development. The first he terms "the progressive incorporation of problems", which is the creation and classification of abnormalities which require treatment, as discussed above. Shrestha (1995), for example, discusses how the people of Nepal were classified as "poor" by developers, and even came to see themselves as poor when their material expectations were raised by the claims of development.

The second strategy is the "professionalisation" of development, whereby development is taken out of the hands of ordinary people and made the exclusive province of 'experts'. This was clearly the case in Ga-Rasai. On the technical side this might include scientists and engineers. On the social side the major culprits are the economists, with their homogenising scientific metanarratives of exchange, but also included are psychologists, sociologists and, of course, anthropologists. This has the effect of excluding local input and retaining control of the forces of change in the hands of outsiders. It also, Escobar argues, has the effect of allowing experts to "remove from the political realm problems which would otherwise be political, and to recast them into the apparently more neutral realm of science". It was not apparent from the case study of Ga-Rasai how this professionalisation might impact upon

politics at a national level, but it was clear that there was a tension between the scientific understanding of the study team, the contracting engineers and Magalies Water, and the political understanding of the local people of the importance of the water project. So, during one of the interminable discussions about whether the Water Committee or the PSC was responsible for the management of the project in Ga-Rasai, one of the study team members asked, as a rebuke, "Are the Water Committee and the PSC political bodies or developmental bodies?"

The third strategy that Escobar identifies is the institutionalisation of development, the consolidation of the administration of development into institutions at a number of levels, ranging from the international (such as JICA, the World Bank and USAID), to the national (the South African Government and Magalies Water) to the local (RDP fora, Water Committees, etc.). This has the effect of maintaining control over development within a network of people who tend to share certain behaviours, values and rationalities, but disperses power among numerous sites within this diffuse apparatus.

1.4 Objectification and subjectification

Central to the practice of development is a process of objectification, whereby people in Third World countries are constructed as abnormal and then cast as the objects of knowledge and management. By identifying these people as 'poor', 'needy', 'underdeveloped' the First World justifies the interventions through which it attempts to maintain control over the Third World. This process of objectification silences the voices of the people whom development is ostensibly trying to help and allows developers to speak for them.

In this way people in Third World countries are constructed as the other. A general model of 'developing people' has been created whereby people from widely differing cultural contexts are assigned common attributes. This must surely tell us more about the developers than the people whom they describe. The objects of development are seen as ignorant and backward (Pigg 1992:502), infantile (Escobar 1995a:30), wasters of resources and despoilers of the environment (Leach & Fairhead 1994). Indeed all of these stereotypes were used by project personnel regarding people in Ga-Rasai. Failures of the system tended to be blamed upon the locals who are ignorant and stupid and unconcerned with the need to save water, rather than being seen as arising from the project itself. The project was designed to work around such 'problems', or address them through mentoring and training where necessary.

Tied to the process of objectification is one of subjectification. The categories created by development are internalised by the people at whom development discourse is aimed. Shrestha (1995) and Pigg (1992, 1996) describe how ideas of development have captured the hearts and minds of people in Nepal and developed into a national obsession. The old ways have become devalued, manual labour is looked down upon and people who are apparently 'less developed' are viewed as inferior. Scientific progress, clerical work and material advancement are given primacy. The effect of this, these writers argue, is to undermine self-reliance and self-worth. This can indeed be seen in Ga-Rasai where technical knowledge, often gleaned from work in urban areas, is seen as a symbol of status. Oriah Manamela, for example, was not well liked but was respected for his technical and administrative skills. He used this advantage strategically when necessary to strengthen his authority and demonstrate his experience in matters of modernity. When the computer for the administration of prepayments was due to be delivered, lively discussions ensued about who would be trained to operate it, as the position of computer operator was quite strongly contested. Manamela explained that as the only person with computer experience he should be the one who should be given training, along with one of his supporters whom he could train to take over, because "computers have a very difficult English, they are very hard to understand".

Many people in Ga-Rasai seemed to have accepted the assumption that their knowledge and ability are inferior to those of outsiders. After a lengthy argument during one of the weekly Project Steering Committee meetings one of the members told me apologetically (and quite seriously), "The people of Ga-Rasai are very stupid".

This reflects a broader trend of demonstrating development. The contractors and the employees of Magalies Water were often quick to criticise the backward locals in order to show that they are 'developed'. Shrestha (1995) and Pigg (1996) report a parallel situation in Nepal where people construct themselves as *bikasi* (developed) and are quick to reject traditional beliefs and values, especially beliefs in shamans. In this way they create themselves in opposition to 'the village'.

However at a local level modernity develops a very local character. It is not adopted wholesale from the West. This is evident in the writings of Shrestha and Pigg on Nepal, where development has taken on very specific connotations derived in part from global discourse, but in part from local understandings of status, markers of tradition, and so on. Thus the writing on the discourse of development "also dovetails with the recognition that all societies create their own modernity" (Watts 1993:265). Certainly the aspirations and

expectations of people in Ga-Rasai, although they may be expressed in modernist terms, have more to do with Ga-Rasai than they do with the urban centres of Europe and America.

Most writers who concentrate on the discourse of development would not deny that development may help the poor, at least on a case by case basis, but they would argue that development is not an innocent effort. Ultimately it is a strategy to control the Third World, its primary objective is not to help the Third World but to maintain the global hegemony of First World states. In the end, it has been argued, development may do more harm than good in the Third World, and overcoming development, rather than development itself, is a precondition to solving its real problems.

1.5 Participation and grassroots action

So what is the solution? Participation of local people has long been touted as a solution to the problems of development. Unfortunately, as a number of writers have noted, participation has come to have a variety of meanings and has become quite divorced from its radical roots (Gardner & Lewis 1996:111). This is discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The ideals of participation remain in Escobar's solution - a return to the radical ideals of grassroots participation, with the new hope suggested by the rise of the New Social Movements (NSMs) in Latin America. I find this highly problematic as participation and grassroots action are more likely to be successful in some contexts than in others. As my analysis of local decision-making processes will make clear, one would have to wait an awfully long time before one could expect to see spontaneously co-operative grassroots movements springing up in villages like Ga-Rasai.

Unfortunately people may not be spontaneously participative and may not have the skills or capability to improve their positions from the grassroots. In a context where a village cannot be seen as isolated from the outside world, it may be necessary to bring in outsiders for their knowledge and resources, even if this just means that they have cellular telephones and the clout to arrange a meeting with representatives of local government. Furthermore, as Mosse argues, often local knowledge is not enough – "If knowledge *about* livelihoods were equivalent to knowledge *for action* then undoubtedly villagers would have solved problems through self-help long ago" (emphasis in the original) (1994:521).

2 Problems with the 'discourse of development' approach

2.1 A monolithic view of development

One response to the criticisms of development made by Escobar and others is that development is not monolithic, that its global effects are not necessarily as clear-cut and one-sided as these writers would have it. "Although structured by relations of power in which particular countries, institutions and groups dominate, development practice and policy are increasingly heterogeneous, and are constantly challenged by people working both within and outside mainstream development institutions." (Gardner & Lewis 1996:103) Many writers reject a view of development which paints it simply as a strategy of power, or a social problem of global proportions. Even Hobart, who is highly critical of the scientific language of development, suggests that it is possible to take a more flexible, less ideologically loaded approach to development: "Development is effectively a synonym for more or less planned social and economic change. So, defining development as a problem susceptible of a solution, or pathologically as requiring a cure, may well be misplaced." (1993:1)

Even if development does maintain global power relations, this is not its only effect. It is multifaceted in that it also addresses problems relating to these power relations. It is easy to make a case for the argument that, at the local level at least, the project in Ga-Rasai was useful in a number of ways. It may not have been an unmitigated success but it helped to provide clean water to Ga-Rasai within the national framework of water management. It also had spin-offs in terms of training and in terms of the involvement of women in local political processes. Although it is perfectly valid to criticise the role of development in international power relations, these arguments do not give a complete account of development in practice.

Accordingly Escobar has been criticised on the basis that his arguments, and in particular his claims for New Social Movements, do not "look too different from the totalising and essentialist visions of the old sort" (Watts 1993:268). There is a danger of such arguments becoming a new metanarrative of development.

Even if one accepts the argument that global power relations are fundamentally exploitative, one must still ask whether Escobar exaggerates the role of development in maintaining them. Surely development itself is symptomatic of these power relations. Just as changes within development have limited efficacy because they do not challenge the balance of power, changes of development have limited efficacy because they too cannot fundamentally challenge global power relations. Without changing global, national and local power relations

in their totality, simply replacing development with something else more equitable will never truly help the Third World. If the First World is indeed intent on maintaining its wealth and power through the domination of the Third World, Escobar and others are in danger of demonising development to the extent of losing sight of the larger context of power relations in which it is founded.

2.2 Modernisation and capacity building

Many of the criticisms of development described above are indeed applicable to Ga-Rasai, in particular those regarding the implications of a modernist framework and an emphasis on scientific discourse. In part the identification of 'gaps in capacity' can be attributed to these aspects of the project. These gaps primarily involved technical knowledge and decision-making skills. The implication was that the local people would be better off if they could develop 'our kinds of knowledge'. Shortage of capacity was also a useful justification for limiting local input into the project.

It might also be argued that there was not so much a shortage of capacity as a difference in emphasis, that local people had their own agendas for the project, which they were quite competent to fulfil using existing skills. Indeed, one of the central arguments of this paper is that the processes of participation had a quite different meaning for the developers than they did for the people of Ga-Rasai, who were more concerned with building consensus than with effective decision-making. Furthermore, the need for rapid decision-making stemmed in large part from the tight timeframe for the project which was imposed by the study team.

However it appears that in some ways the developers are correct in suggesting that local development requires outside assistance. I shall argue in Chapter 4 that local decision-making processes are not effective in producing decisions for action. This makes it very difficult for local people to engage effectively with urgent and important issues. There is a real need to develop effective decision-making skills in order for the people of Ga-Rasai to compete effectively in a global arena. For this outside help can be valuable. This is not necessarily the same as 'catching up' to the West through the adoption of Western processes. It was precisely where assistance was interpreted in this way that the study team went wrong.

Similarly, there are grounds for arguing that people in Ga-Rasai could benefit from more technical knowledge, and that their lack of capacity in this regard limited their ability to participate in a project such as this one. The water system in Ga-Rasai was quite technologically sophisticated. It may well have been somewhat more complex than was

strictly necessary, but its complexity was mainly due to the complications involved in supplying clean water in an area where all of the water sources were either insufficient or contaminated. Existing local knowledge was not sufficient to provide solutions to these problems.

The writing on Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK) and Rural Peoples' Knowledge (RPK) has made an important contribution to questions of participation. The seminal work in this area was carried out by Chambers (1989), who argues that indigenous people have a deep understanding of local conditions. Indigenous knowledge can be innovative and can play a complementary role to scientific knowledge when applied to local conditions. A number of writers have built on or criticised Chambers' conception of ITK, noting its applications and limitations and its interrelationship with specific local contexts and power relations (Schoones and Thompson 1994, Leach and Fairhead 1994, Brush 1993).

Much of the literature on participation, however, deals with agricultural projects in rural areas. Clearly this is the area of development where rural people will have the most to contribute in terms of existing knowledge. The project in Ga-Rasai had somewhat different constraints. In particular, questions of an existing knowledge base – ITK or RPK - are less relevant in such a situation. Whereas in an agricultural project the beneficiaries are likely to have a long history of agricultural experience, in this case people have never had experience with the management of reticulated water systems. Their previous experience with water provided very little basis for contributing to the planning and implementation of the technologically sophisticated project. This in turn impacted upon their capacity for effective participation.

There were real constraints, then, upon the committees' ability to participate meaningfully in the project. While this should not be exaggerated to justify the maintenance of control in the hands of the study team, it should be recognised that the participation of the committees was limited by the fact that they were continually struggling to do new things in new ways.

2.3 The demands of globalisation

While it is useful to analyse the relationship between development and power, the arguments of Escobar and others place too much emphasis on the hegemonic strategy of the First World. It is often more valuable to look at development in terms of interaction between the global and the local than it is to search for international patterns of domination.

The Third World is becoming increasingly immersed in a global environment that encompasses more than just the strategies and aspirations of the First World. It is important that local people understand systems of knowledge which derive from outside the local setting because there are no real boundaries between the outside and the inside. Strathern (1995) argues that the global and the local are simply different ways of viewing the world. They are often used strategically as people move between global and local levels of discourse, manipulating their knowledge in order to obtain their objectives. In Ga-Rasai, as in much of the Third World, people's ability to adapt to change is compromised by their limited repertoire of tools for dealing with the global context. In order to cope with the effects of change which is produced at a national or even international level, local people must be familiar with wider processes.

Ga-Rasai is very much part of a broader reality which impacts upon it in a number of ways. This includes outside employment, external supply of resources, national government, national water management systems and structures, and pressure on resources from competing interest groups. The latter includes the inhabitants of the areas upstream on the Moretele who pollute the river and the farmers upstream and downstream who need the water for their crops.

These factors are often not controllable from within the village, but the people of Ga-Rasai must respond to the pressures and demands placed upon them by the outside world. They have to adopt or at least understand other discourses and attitudes, and learn to do new things in new ways. It is no longer reasonable to expect local settings to be able to operate only on local term.

A conception of development which is based upon the relationship between the global and the local provides an alternative to Escobar's locally orientated approach. Featherstone argues that globalisation is not the same as Westernisation. "[I]n no way can a global culture be conceived of as the culture of the nation-state writ large" (1995:5?). It does not represent the homogenisation of cultures, rather it involves the progressive incorporation of diversity within a global framework.

In some ways the Third World does have to 'catch up' if it is going to enter the international arena on a competitive footing. This does not mean that it has to be the same as the West or that it needs to follow the route taken by First World countries. However it is important not to simply reject outside influences, equating technical and economic advancement with cultural mimicry. I find that it is useful to view development in terms of the global and the

local because such an approach does not lose sight of relations of power, but neither does it attempt to account for development simply in terms of global patterns of domination and resistance.

2.4 Applications to a local-level study

The criticisms of writers such as Escobar and Mitchell do not provide a suitable model for a local level analysis of the project in Ga-Rasai. Some aspects of these arguments such as the criticisms of modernist approaches to development, are relevant. They are also useful in explaining and questioning the balance of power which clearly worked in favour of the developers. Through their dominant power positions the JICA study team and Magalies Water were able to assert their own understandings of the problems of and solutions to water management in Ga-Rasai, and to a large extent these were accepted within Ga-Rasai. However as a micro-study of a single development project, my analysis took place at a local level. As a result some of the arguments regarding global power relations are difficult to apply. For example the scale of the study did not allow me to investigate how the project tied into broader Japanese foreign policy, relations of trade or international loan agreements between Japan and the Third World.

At the level of the individual project I was more interested in the micro-politics of the study team, local government, Magalies Water and the people of Ga-Rasai than I was in the global power struggles described by Escobar.

In focussing almost exclusively on power and control Escobar takes a rather narrow view of development and ignores the complex ways in which it is significant for the people who are actually involved in it. In the chapters which follow I shall argue that, on the whole, local people were not really interested in controlling the project. Escobar's arguments shed little light on the question of why people participated enthusiastically in project meetings.

Finally, issues of power and accountability become less clear cut at the level of actual programming. The discourse of development in this project is difficult to dismantle for it is tied up with national discourse such as that of the RDP. The relationship between these different levels of discourse is discussed in the following chapters. One could well argue that the infrastructure built under the RDP was inappropriate, problematic, and founded upon questionable principles, and that the study team was just making the best of a bad situation. After all, if the study team had not become involved in Ga-Rasai, Magalies Water would have eventually implemented a similar project, except with fewer resources and perhaps an even

less enlightened approach. The project must be located within a framework which is more complex than the division between the First and the Third World described by Escobar, and which to some extent dictated the design of the project. It is therefore difficult to confront the power relations behind the project from the micro perspective. It may indeed be true that broader discourse and practice must be changed, but this is not within the scope of this study.

3 Problematising my position

3.1 Anthropologists in development

Where, then, does this leave the anthropologist? There are two main camps regarding the issue of development: the anthropology of development school, which includes many of the writers discussed above, and the development anthropology writers, who are writing from within the field of development.

Development anthropology writers tend to take the view that there is space within development for anthropologists to make a meaningful contribution. Of course many of them have their own interests in arguing this, because they are employed within the development sector. There is however a large gap between the level of discourse, which the anthropology of development writers are concerned with, and the local project level, which is largely the province of development anthropologists.

Development anthropologists tend to take the approach that development is not monolithic and that it is possible to work from within development to the benefit of the Third World. Even if development is problematic, there is space within development to work for local interests. Grillo argues "Development is happening, it might be said, much of it bad, but some perhaps useful and wanted by those who are affected, with or without the participation of anthropologists. But there is a reasonable chance that the application of anthropological knowledge will moderate the bad and enhance the good." (1985:30)

Anthropologists in particular can use their special skills and knowledge, what Grillo terms "the bringing to bear of a certain frame of mind or manner of thinking which illuminates the social and cultural dimensions of a problem" (ibid:28), to help identify and work towards these issues.

With this in mind, the development anthropologists tend to work from the point of view that it is their responsibility to choose to participate in development projects which will indeed do some good and reject those which will not.

Escobar, of course, would counter that development in general is the problem. The presence of anthropologists can not alleviate this and may ultimately even exacerbate it. He argues (1991) that anthropologists in the field of development have often accepted an 'applied' role at the cost of more 'academic' pursuits, and that they are largely out of touch with recent theoretical developments in both development and anthropology, especially regarding questions of representation.

In arguing for a withdrawal from employment in the formal development sector he takes a rejectionist stance with an honourable lineage running from Malinowski, who argued that anthropologists should not assist the colonial governments to rule their subjects, through figures such as Sol Tax, who rejected employment in order to ensure that his responsibility to his target group was not compromised by responsibility to an employer (Bennett 1996), to the present. However I prefer to take the position that there is space for the involvement of the anthropologist, providing she is discriminating. At the same time, I take Tax's point that when one accepts a salary one is automatically in danger of being placed in a position where one's discrimination is compromised. I do not feel that the project in Ga-Rasai was such a case.

3.2 Speaking for the 'natives'

In becoming part of the professionalisation and institutionalisation of development, Escobar argues, anthropologists have also presented themselves as 'experts', as the definitive voice on 'how natives think'. This, indeed, was part of my role in Ga-Rasai, mediating between the local people and the Japanese, and between local understandings and the 'hard science' of the engineers. Escobar asks whether natives really need someone to speak for them. Looking beyond the confines of the individual project, he is asking why development is designed in such a way that the people at whom it is aimed do need someone to speak for them.

In reality, however, it is not simply the nature of development that makes it necessary for outsiders to speak for local people. The structure of the bureaucracy, local prejudices against rural people and infrastructural limitations make it very difficult for the people of Ga-Rasai to communicate effectively with local government and organisations such as Magalies Water or

Eskom, the electricity supplier. There was certainly a role for developers as intermediaries in Ga-Rasai.

What Escobar is concerned about, of course, is that in speaking for local people developers effectively deny them a voice. This is the real issue and one that I tried to be sensitive to in my position as a liaison between the village and the other parties involved in development. It was for this reason that I tried to encourage representatives of Magalies Water and the Eastern District Council to visit Ga-Rasai, and the people of Ga-Rasai to contact these organisations themselves when problems arose, so that more direct and effective lines of communication could be established between the village and the organisations responsible for its wellbeing. This was clearly a concern for other study team members as well.

Escobar's arguments may well be turned against him, for he is also guilty of speaking for the natives. Much of the Third World, deluded as it is by the smoke and mirrors of development, might not agree with Escobar's assessment that development is in fact not in its best interests. This places the anthropologist in a difficult position – who are we to tell others that they do not want what they think they want?

3.3 My role as an 'expert'

As I was employed as an 'expert' to impart skills and knowledge to the local people, I might well be accused of reinforcing the 'professionalisation' of development discussed by Escobar. This is a valid criticism, particularly as the project was clearly modernist in its approach and a great deal of emphasis was placed on specialist knowledge and professional expertise.

Unfortunately I was not in a position to change this aspect of the project. By the time I arrived my role had been defined and my schedule laid out in detail. No doubt I could have been more active in trying to influence the way the project was carried out, and more sensitive to local nuances than I was, but on the whole my role was limited to administration. There was little opportunity to engage in planning and policy-making. My contribution involved liasing with the community and helping it to fulfil the study team's management objectives in a way that would be useful and meaningful within the local context.

4 Conclusion

Development is fundamentally based upon relations of power. The arguments of the anthropology of development writers are valuable because they take power relations as their

main object of study, and challenge the tendency of developers to gloss over questions of power.

These writers question developers' claims that development is in the interests of the Third World, arguing that it actually maintains the dominant position of First World states at the expense of the Third World. Importantly, from the point of view of the Ga-Rasai project, they also analyse how developers use the discourse of development to maintain control over development projects.

However they do not provide a sufficient framework for understanding the project in Ga-Rasai. A local-level analysis of the project uncovers another level of dynamics which cannot be accounted for within the 'discourse of development' approach. This includes the different understandings of the various parties involved in the project, which derive from the specific cultural and historical contexts in which they are located.

The following chapters will investigate these understandings, how they are situated within the power relations of the project, and how they shaped the project itself. I begin in Chapter 3 with an analysis of why participation is important in the international and national discourses of development and how it has come to be applied in practice.

Chapter 3: The broader context of development

This chapter and the chapter which follows approach the question of discourse in development in a rather different way than the arguments presented in Chapter 2. In these chapters I will investigate how aspects of the discourse of development, and in particular an emphasis on participation, recur at different levels of locality. However in each case the meaning and importance of this discourse is somewhat different. This is a factor which is often overlooked by the parties to development. In a sense this is what Marshall Sahlins (1985:61) has termed a "working misunderstanding", in that both parties understand their relationship and the core concepts on which their interaction is based somewhat differently, but this does not prevent their relationship from working effectively for each of them. The problems with such a relationship arise when the misunderstanding prevents it from operating effectively – when it works imperfectly. This can lead to frustration and irritation, as it has on occasion in Ga-Rasai.

1 Global and local contexts of analysis

I have divided the discourse surrounding the Ga-Rasai project into three levels – international, national and local. This division is arbitrary, for the division is less strict than it may initially appear. These discourses are not monolithic, individual actors may well use different language, practices and understandings. The levels of discourse also interpenetrate each other. This is one of the reasons that the same language is used at all, although it may be interpreted differently. I consider these divisions to be most useful and most valid, but one could choose any number of others – regional divisions, provincial divisions, divisions by donor, divisions by consultancy or type of consultancy, divisions by type of project, and so on.

In the previous chapter I argued that it is useful to view development within the framework of the global and the local. This is a useful way of understanding the different levels of discourse. The global and the local do not have an independent, objective existence, they are defined within their relationship to each other. Whereas the international discourse of development could be seen as global and the national discourse as local, the national discourse was global relative to the local discourse of the people of Ga-Rasai. In this sense I take the global to mean encompassing, generalising, totalising, whereas the local is idiosyncratic, combining unique characteristics with elements of the global to give them meaning within a specific context (Strathern 1995:163).

The same concepts, then, were interpreted at different levels. However this was not simply the fleshing out of the same ideas as one drew nearer to the actual site of development. Although local discourse drew from the global discourse, and may even have contributed to it in some ways, they were often subject to very different interpretations. Concepts such as participation were viewed quite differently by actors working from different positions in the development framework.

These positions were not always stable or clearly defined. I have chosen to view discourse in terms of levels because the same people can draw from different levels at different times, or even the same time. This is why I do not write of the discourse of the study team, or the discourse of local government. There is no simple correlation between the study team and the international discourse of development, between national structures and the national development discourse, and between the people of Ga-Rasai and the local discourse of development. Many members of the study team were South African and one was seTswana-speaking, as were many people in local government. However it seemed that their positions encouraged them to make use of discourse in certain ways. The divisions that I have drawn, then, reflect how individuals and groups make use of discourse in practice. This was related to cultural and historical factors and to political agendas. Ultimately, though, I do not trace discourse through these levels in order to place people within a framework of power, but in order to trace the relationships between different interpretations of the same or similar concepts.

2 Participation and the international discourse of development

2.1 Participation versus control

The discourse of international development is not monolithic, it cannot be seen as a single set of language and practice which is used indiscriminately in all areas of development in all parts of the world. This is why I prefer to view it as a global discourse, which implies both that it is not uniform and that it is interpreted locally. However the international discourse of development does have certain common elements which impact on practice and set the tone for local development projects world-wide. A number of these were discussed in the previous chapter, including, of course, a heavy reliance on scientific discourse. Scientific discourse penetrated all aspects of the project in Ga-Rasai, from the language of engineering used in discussing infrastructural matters to the language of scientific management that underpinned the institutional aspects of the project.

The language of participation is another aspect of discourse that has become central to development programming throughout the world. The emphasis on participatory processes in development originated in a radical response to modernisation. This was based on the idea that greater involvement of local people in the planning and implementation of development would result in projects which were better aligned with local contexts, and would shift control over the projects to the people at whom they were targeted. In this way development could become truly empowering. On the whole these arguments predated the criticisms of development *per se* discussed in the previous chapter, which argue that development can never truly be empowering because its precise function is to disempower the Third World.

Participation, however, has always been an ideal rather than a concrete strategy and it has assumed diverse forms in practice. Oakley (1991) distinguishes between participation as an element in development projects and participation as a fundamental dynamic. In most cases, and certainly in Ga-Rasai, it has featured as the former.

More than this, it has become separated from control as the nature of participation has been strictly circumscribed. Developers have a real interest in a limited degree of participation but they will likely try to maintain control of the development process wherever they can. From the developers' point of view there are a number of practical and political reasons to encourage participation of a sort. Local participation helps developers to design projects which are specifically suited to local contexts. It has also been used to encourage local people to take 'ownership' of the products of development. If the beneficiaries participate in the process, according to development logic, there is a better chance that they will feel committed to the process and so contribute to its success. This also means that they will not be so quick to blame the developers if the project runs into problems, and will be more likely to try and make it work themselves. This is also convenient for the developers as it means that they can blame the community if things go wrong.

However participation has very rarely given local people real power over the deployment of development resources. As such it has become a somewhat degraded term. Escobar writes that it has become "strictly conceived in a uti'itarian fashion while denying the political character of participation" (1984:391). This was certainly the case in Ga-Rasai.

There is a tension, therefore, between participation and control. Developers allow, and even encourage, a certain degree of local participation in development. The achievement of their

objectives depends upon it. However they must also limit the degree of participation in order to maintain their control over the development process.

2.2 Participation and democracy

Some of the political language of participation has remained, however. This is particularly evident in its connection to an international discourse on democracy. Development aid is closely linked to international pressure for democratisation of the Third World. Grassroots participation is seen as inherently democratic, with project design and management coming from below. It also moves some power from the state to civil society, creating more favourable conditions for democracy.

Of course the view that civil society is inherently democratic is itself flawed. It is based on the assumption of homogeneity and a romantic idea of human nature. The community is the core of civil society in development discourse. Robertson (1984:141) distinguishes two conceptions of the community which tend to be used simultaneously: the community "is seen as the raw material for change but in another sense it is an idealised goal for development". Anthropologists have long noted that people have very romantic notions about the unified nature of communities, notions which are often wildly inaccurate. Certainly in South Africa, at least, communities tend to be very strongly divided along social, political and economic lines. They are often characterised by the domination of marginal groups and by vicious power struggles over scarce resources. The use of the term 'community' to delineate groups of people and imply a common interest is itself a political tactic (Thornton and Ramphele 1988), one which has been used repeatedly in South Africa by a diverse range of political actors including the apartheid government, liberation movements, village-level 'community organisations' and international development agencies.

To some extent the ideal of participation for democracy has been carried through in practice but generally, as in Ga-Rasai, the project design and implementation has been largely in the hands of the donors and local bodies and structures have been left with ongoing management after the project's completion. This has the effect of allowing the donor states to strengthen civil society while maintaining a high degree of control over the form that development takes. If empowerment is a goal it must be understood to be incomplete and located within the strategic framework of donor states, rather than within the ideals of radical writers such as Paulo Freire, who termed it a process whereby "the dominated classes ... seek their own freedom from domination" (cited in Thomas 1992:20).

In passing it might be noted that circumventing the state actually gives donor countries more freedom to pursue their own agendas in other countries. This is generally a more important factor in countries with weaker, poorer governments with less international support than the South African government. If it was a consideration in JICA's programming I am not well placed to comment on it.

Participation, then, is an important aspect of the international discourse of development, but in practice the original ideal of participation has been subverted to maintain, rather than challenge, the structure of global power relations.

3 Participation in national discourse

Development discourse in South Africa draws a great deal from the international discourse on development, including an overtly modernist approach, but it has a distinct local flavour. Once again the stress is on democracy, equality, freedom from discrimination and, of course, participation, but these take on special meanings in the South African context.

3.1 The legacy of apartheid

South African development discourse is rooted in the struggle against apartheid. Much of the aid that was channelled to South Africa before the early 1990s was intended to redress the imbalances of apartheid and to weaken apartheid itself in a number of ways, including by strengthening civil society. Much of the aid since then has continued to be aimed at those who were disadvantaged by apartheid.

The apartheid government placed strict limits upon the participation of black South Africans in their own development. As well as having no say in the formation of policy regarding resource distribution and infrastructural development, their ability to determine their own fates was severely curtailed by laws regarding where they could live, where they could work, and so on.

National development discourse can in large part be seen as a response to this. A great deal of emphasis was place upon participation, consultation and transparency as a reaction to the limits on participation, lack of consultation and lack of transparency that characterised the apartheid state. The initial policy framework of the RDP lists among its six basic principles "A people driven process" and "Democratisation of South Africa" (ANC 1994:5-6).

It would be a mistake to view the whole character of development discourse as a reaction to apartheid, however. Local cultural factors, including amongst others the Tswana approach to participatory decision-making that is discussed in the following chapter, also contribute to forming the national discourse. To some extent the national discourse of development is also a function of the interests of the people who use or resist it.

3.2 Responsibility for services

In practice local participation in service provision takes the pressure off the government and parastatal bodies such as Magalies Water to supply services. This raises the issue of responsibility for services. The apartheid government was not very concerned with providing services to 'black' areas. It neglected to provide services itself but also did not make any attempt to help local structures to gain access to them. The strategy of apartheid was always to discourage black people from taking responsibility for their own lives.

Under the present government things have changed somewhat. The government has undertaken to provide water throughout the country and it is important that it is seen to fulfil this commitment. As it does not have the capacity to do this itself, it encourages local communities to take responsibility for their own needs. It does so by representing increased responsibility as a good thing. Not surprisingly, people are often dubious about this, feeling that it may be a burden rather than a privilege.

This was indicated in Bapong, the site of one of the other JICA pilot projects, where people refused to pay for water because they felt that this would imply that they were condoning the current system and were prepared to take some sort of responsibility for it. In spite of the study team's offers of help, little effort was made to resolve factional differences and to work together to implement a working water system, proving that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink.

There is no logical reason to view responsibility for services as a privilege. It is not one of the more sought after forms of self-determinism. As Graeme Rodgers remarked to me when he introduced me to Ga-Rasai, why would anyone want to know where their water is coming from? "I would much rather just turn on the tap to brush my teeth in the morning and not have to worry about whether the pump is working or whether the chemicals have been delivered for the filtration plant, but we all act as if we are doing them a favour by making them responsible for their own water."

My interviews with members of the committees also indicated that they were happy to leave as much as possible to JICA. They did not show any desire to participate more fully in the implementation or operation of their own water supply.

In a similar vein, cost recovery is also touted by developers and the government as something which is good for the consumers of services. Payment can perhaps be viewed as the lowest level of participation in service provision. This is apparent in the language used in meetings and in the Masakhane campaig.. which is currently in operation nation-wide. This campaign is aimed at improving services, but a major component of it is to encourage payment for services, as the government cannot afford to provide them.

However cost recovery itself is not as straightforward as it might seem. Escobar argues that "Cost recovery is a euphemism for transforming healthcare, schooling and other public services into private, fee based institutions as in the United States" (1995:145). This means that access to service is not equally available to both rich and poor. Escobar sees this as a strategy to maintain the disparity between the haves and the have-nots. "Programmes for decentralisation and cost recovery transform questions of social inequality and powerlessness into issues of efficiency and control" (ibid:146). This is an extreme position, but it indicates that cost recovery may not be the innocuous concept that it appears to be when contained within the technical language of development.

The dominant approach to cost recovery has impacted on the strategies used to pursue it. The organisers of the Masakhane campaign approach the issue from a development perspective, trying to sell the concept that cost recovery is good for everyone. They also seem to subscribe to it themselves, for their strategy is based upon attacking ignorance through awareness-building workshops and presentations. However non-payment for services does not seem to stem from ignorance at all. It is perfectly rational. In my interviews with community members most seemed to understand quite well why water needs to be paid for, they were merely unwilling to do so themselves. After all, why would anyone pay for services if they do not have to? Even if people agree that the community as a whole should pay for water, why should any single household pay when its neighbours, who may use more water than they do, pay nothing? The advantage of the prepayment system in Ga-Rasai, as both the study team and the committee members realised, was that it meant that (barring illegal connections) no-one could use water without paying for it.

One might also ask, although to my knowledge this question was never raised in Ga-Rasai, why people in Ga-Rasai should have to pay for the cleaning of water which was polluted by the residents of the Winterveld, upstream on the Moretele river.

The national discourse of development, then, is in many ways inseparable from the global discourse of development in that they contribute to each other in a number of ways (for each level of discourse impacts upon those both below and above it). However, as in every local site of development, the global language of development has been used selectively in South Africa with some elements highlighted, others underplayed, and all interpreted within the framework of local knowledge and experience. Participation, in particular, is constructed within a national cultural, political and historical context, and is used strategically by individuals and groups in order to further their own agendas.

4 Conclusion

Developers have an interest in some degree of local participation in development. This must be seen within the context of national and international conceptions of democracy and governance and in light of the instrumental value of local participation in development projects. It might be true that developers wish to retain control over their projects and the recipients of development wish to retain control over their lives. The importance of development projects is that they do impact upon people's lives, this is why participation is so politically charged. However there are degrees of participation just as there are degrees of control, and some aspects of development entail more political advantage than others. In reality people often do not want to burdened with development projects and it is in developers' interests to encourage some form of participation without losing control. This can, and probably often does, result in a situation like that of Ga-Rasai where the developers try to encourage participation and the local people are happy to leave the burden with the developers.

I suspect that if developers were to surrender real control over the process to the people whom it affects, those people would be likely to take a more active interest in it. People are more likely to engage in the process, and contest control over it, when it is apparent that there is clear political advantage in doing so.

The following chapter will explore how the language of development has a unique meaning at the village level. Here participation is important once again. This derives in part from its

position in national and international development discourse but it is shaped by local historical and cultural factors and local political priorities.

Chapter 4: The local context of development

The process of taking elements of discourse from the global to reuse and reinterpret in a local context is repeated at the village level. This is what Levi-Strauss terms "bricolage" (1962:16). Villagers combine global understandings, processes and structures with local skills and knowledge to form "a heterogeneous repertoire which, if extensive, is nevertheless limited" (1962:17). They draw from this repertoire to construct their own interpretations of the world and to develop tools to deal with new challenges.

This chapter examines the role of historical conceptions of participatory government and local models of decision-making in shaping local understandings of participation in development. These factors were at least as important as the national and international discourses of development in determining the nature of community participation.

Community participation is central to Tswana governance. It is manifested in meetings. The form and function of meetings have adapted to the changing environment of Ga-Rasai, but certain key elements remain. These include the pursuit of individual and factional political interests and decision-making based on consensus. Consensus-building is a means of developing and maintaining group solidarity in the face of factional disputes. It is also the only way of determining group action where there is no means of enforcing group decisions.

The strategic use of absenteeism also continues to be important. In a society which values solidarity above all things, open dissent is avoided. Absenteeism allows groups and individuals to express disagreement and withhold consensus without openly voicing opposition.

These factors shaped local participation in the project. They were used to incorporate global conceptions of participatory development into a local body of knowledge and practice. This incorporation was not simply the adoption of foreign ideas. It involved the combination of existing and imported elements to construct understandings and practices which were new to Ga-Rasai, yet were entirely local in character.

Thus the management of the reticulated water system was carried out by the Water Committee and the PSC, both of which were created by outsiders. These committees carried out their responsibilities in meetings which followed a formal Western structure with a chairperson, minutes and an agenda. However these committees and the meetings which they

held were governed by the principles of consensus-building and political gain, and operated in ways which were quite opaque to the people who introduced them.

1 The ethnographic context of Tswana politics

A good deal of ethnographic work of a very high quality has been carried out on the politics of the Tswana and related peoples, most notably by Schapera (in the 1920s, '30s and '40s), Kuper (in the 1960s) and the Comaroffs (in the 1960s and 70s). Although the present context of life in the North West Province is substantially different from the societies described by these authors, I believe that historical attitudes, values and relationships have a direct bearing on the way village life is conducted today.

1.1 Participatory governance

The relationship between the community and community leaders, such as the headman and the chief, and in particular the importance of community participation, is central to any study of Tswana politics. The chief or the headman is usually seen as the centre of power in the village, and is attributed a great deal of authority In practice, however, he is held accountable to the community. Leaders who attempt to rule as despots are likely to be censured by their subjects.

Schapera cites a letter from Isang, the acting chief of the Kgatla, to Kgama III of the Ngwato, in which Isang writes: "Nations make progress by debating in Parliaments, not by the absolute Monarchy which you, chief, are at all times seeking. Chief, the proverb says: 'The lion said, I am strong when alone; the man said, I am strong with the help of others'" (1943:24).

The Comaroffs analyse the spiritual aspects of this relationship. They report that the wellbeing of the village in precolonial times depended on a balance between the power of the chief and the involvement of the community. Rainmaking, the most important manifestation of chiefly power, depended on a good relationship between the chief and the community and between the living and the ancestors. Rainmaking could only work when chief was virile and community was in a state of balance (coolness). If the chief was too weak or too authoritarian this would endanger the balance of forces which maintained the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the village. (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:243).

Participation was ensured, and power decentralised, through the institution of the village council. This is usually termed the *lekgotla* by most Tswana-speaking groups, or the *lekgota*

among the Kgalagari with whom Kuper conducted his research. This body consisted of the "headman in council, which comprises the adult male citizens" (Kuper 1970:78). It would meet regularly to discuss administrative and legal matters, to provide for the dissemination of information and to discuss the village's political interaction with outside powers (Kuper 1971:89).

According to Kuper (1971.:89-90) the *lekgota* also had a number of secondary functions. It provided a "listening post" for the headman, so that he could gauge the mood of his citizens. By the same token it provided the citizenry with a forum in which to raise criticisms of the leader's decisions and suggestions regarding policy, often quite vigorously. It also allowed the citizenry to exert public pressure on citizens who were seen to be evading their responsibility to the community. This was one of the few ways in which it could back up its authority during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The *lekgota* was the place where individuals could register their personal commitment to policies, or publicly disassociate themselves from them. It provided a space for the constant restatement and adaptation of communal values. These last two points were particularly important, as we shall see, in the light of the significance of consensus in council matters. In fact it might well be argued that from some perspectives these "secondary" functions were not really secondary at all.

Council politics tended to be dominated by the power plays of two or more factions. These factions were largely kin-based (Kuper 1970:76). The council tended to be divided along factional lines when dealing with internal issues of resource allocation and power relations. When meeting with outside parties, however, factional differences would be disregarded, as the community would unite (temporarily at least) to meet with the outsiders (Kuper 1971:84). Similarly judicial matters tended not to divide the community, the parties were treated as isolated individuals or groups and the citizen body would be expected to remain unbiased and united in its deliberations.

1.2 Consensus and decision-making

The decision-making process was based upon the need for consensus. In order for a decision to be made, all parties had to agree. The decision, as such, was not as important or conclusive as it might be in Western societies. Its significance lay in the fact that it signalled an agreement, and it remained valid only as long as the important players remained in consensus. This stress on consensus also reflected a preoccupation with reducing conflict and maintaining community solidarity. The meetings themselves, it could be argued, were as

much about reaching consensus and reinforcing solidarity as they were about deciding a course for action.

In practice this meant that decisions were hard to reach and not necessarily binding. "Men may feel committed to follow the ruling of the *lekgota* on if they participated in its deliberations and made their support public" (Kuper 1970:124).

For this reason absenteeism was a very popular strategy. By avoiding council meetings, just by staying at home, men could distance themselves from the decisions that were being made. They could legitimately claim that they were not parties to the agreement or even that they knew nothing of it. Through absenteeism they could clearly express their opposition without disturbing the illusion of community solidarity. "The popularity of absenteeism as a political tactic is perhaps related to the fact that while it demonstrates opposition it avoids direct conflict. If one is absent from a *lekgota* meeting one cannot commit oneself to the support of a policy – but one is not forced to voice direct opposition." Kuper (1970:179)

In fact one does not even necessarily need to be physically absent in order to use this tactic. People who are not central to an issue can claim not to be party to a decision simply by not actively supporting it. Support must be demonstrated through participation. Silence does not necessarily mean consent.

However the tactic of absenteeism also means that the requirement for consensus does not paralyse the system completely. In Western meetings a faction can disagree and be overruled and the course of action will proceed regardless. In Tswana politics dissent would derail the process. People are not willing to do this but wish to make their disagreement clear. Dissent is not ruled out but merely postponed. Absenteeism allows dissatisfied parties to raise the issue again at a later date, justifiably pointing out that they were not party to the decision.

The flexibility of the system was enhanced by the fact that decisions were rarely recorded, even as literacy became more commonplace. As no records were kept individuals could plead ignorance of decisions that they were unhappy with, and could allow themselves greater freedom in making and breaking political alliances (Kuper 1971:86-87).

As a system for maintaining community solidarity this had its advantages. As a decision-making mechanism, however, it was not terribly efficient. The need for consensus meant that reaching decisions was a lengthy process. Even when decisions were made they were not necessarily binding. This was a problem particularly in areas of decision-making where the

lekgotla tended to be divided upon factional lines, that is, especially regardi issues of internal policy. "In dealing with matters of this sort...it is extremely difficult to get an effective decision to take positive action" (Kuper 1970:174-5).

Kuper rather prophetically suggests that this could continue to be problematic in future. Indeed, as questions of internal policy become more complex and more immediate in today's changing context, it seems that the consensus-based approach is becoming less and less suited to deal with the problems which face rural communities. This is true of consensus as a decision-making mechanism and as a device for maintaining community solidarity. "The *lekgota* may well gain in authority in future, but many of the difficulties it has always faced as a policy-making body will be hard to overcome. Comparative research will perhaps show to what extent there are irreducible complications of government by committee in face-to-face societies, where the committee must reach consensus before it can initiate effective action." (Kuper 1971:98)

This study might represent such comparative research, but I am more concerned with the way these inefficiencies become increasingly problematic as such 'face-to-face' societies become increasingly drawn into the field of global relationships. It would certainly no longer be accurate to ca' Ga-Rasai a 'face-to-face society'. Many residents of Ga-Rasai work hundreds of kilometr.. away, and it is regularly visited by developers, government officials, service providers, salespeople and other outsiders. Other outsiders have a significant impact on the village without ever visiting Ga-Rasai or even being aware of its existence. As the pace of life increases and villagers extend their networks to reach across the country and to national, and now even international, organisations, the cracks in the system of decision-making by consensus and the problems of relying on community solidarity are becoming more and more apparent.

2 Participation and decision-making in Ga-Rasai

The picture presented in these older ethnographies of Tswana societies illuminates the patterns that I identified in Ga-Rasai. The context is radically different, of course, but there is a great deal of continuity with the methods and understandings of earlier times. This is particularly true of decision-making processes. Many of the events that Kuper describes could just as well occur in Ga-Rasai today. A pertinent example is Kuper's "Case of the Pumpers", which I have included in Appendix 2. With the change of a few names and other minor details, this could easily describe a series of events in Ga-Rasai.

2.1 Community participation

Community participation is a central issue in Ga-Rasai. A great deal of criticism is levelled at the leaders of the community, and particularly at Peter Tlale, the somewhat despotic Chairperson of the Community Authority, for ignoring this ideal. Nowadays, however, it often does seem to be more of an ideal (and a source of dispute) than a governing principle.

Meetings are still seen as the best way to decide on matters of importance. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a number of decision-making groups are involved in village administration, including amongst others the Community Authority, the Water Committee and the PSC. Important issues are ideally left to the community meetings which occur every month or so. In practice the Community Authority often does not follow this principle where it can get away with it.

The *lekgotla* is still mentioned. In a recent needs analysis carried out by a 'task team' selected for the purpose, the most important training needs were seen to be those relating to communication. By way of introduction the "previous means of communication" was addressed, namely that "The community used meeting in *Kgotla* [council meeting place]".

2.2 Factions and disputes

Struggles between kinship-based factions often dominate decisions on internal policy, power relations and resource allocation. As in the councils described by Kuper, committees tended to be composed of representatives of various factions. Even though there was often a dispute between the Water Committee and the PSC over who was in charge of the JICA project, factional ties would cut across committee divisions when issues of resources and power were raised.

So when R D Tlale, the Chairperson of the PSC (who also happened to be closely related to Peter Tlale), was given the task of allocating the (paid) labour required by JICA's contracting engineers, a number of conflicts occurred. Members of opposing factions in the PSC joined with others in the Water Committee to criticise him for giving work to his family and friends, while he was supported by members of his own faction in both structures. The committees were designed to deal with issues that affect the community as a whole. They could be expected to be united in such a case, particularly in their dealings with outsiders such as the study team and Magalies Water. However often matters are not clear cut and issues which affect the whole community are also related to resource allocation, as in this case, and

factional divisions occur. It seems likely that as outsiders visit regularly and become more a part of the local scene, as I did, cracks will tend to appear in the façade of unity presented by the villagers.

The importance of meetings as an arena for factional power struggles is addressed in Chapter 6.

2.3 Consensus and strategic absence

Consensus is central to decision-making in Ga-Rasai. As in the *lekgota* described by Kuper, consensus is a prerequisite for the legitimacy of any decision. Furthermore, local bodies and processes are more concerned with consensus-building than with decision-making. It seems that decision-making is a route to consensus, as much as consensus-building is a route to decisions.

The pursuit of consensus cannot be separated from the factional nature of Tswana politics. It is an important mechanism for limiting the divisive effects of factional disputes. At the same time, factional divides make it almost impossible to achieve consensus on particularly controversial issues. Effective decision-making is severely impaired by this constant tension between factionalism and consensus.

Part of the importance of consensus, even more than in the communities that Kuper and Schapera describe, can also be attributed to the fact that it is almost impossible to enforce any decision. The Community Authority and the committees which fall under it are not officially recognised and have no coercive power. This was a crucial problem for cost recovery strategies. The importance of consensus in the weekly PSC meetings, and the problems associated with consensus-based decision-making, are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

Not surprisingly absenteeism remains important both as a means of communication and as a political strategy – it is both a way of registering dissent and a means of undermining unpopular courses of action. At the same time it allows people to avoid openly expressing their dissent which might result in conflict.

Strategic absence was used at a number of levels. Powerful factions within the village opposed Peter Tlale's Community Authority. As a result they neglected to attend community meetings and refused to be bound by decisions made in their absence. This weakened his position but was not entirely effective as he managed to maintain his position partly through

his relationships with outsiders, and was not completely dependent on the participation of other villagers in local governance. As a result the citizen body was forced to confront him directly over the issue of the revenue from hunting. His position was threatened at this point but he managed to retain it, probably in part because there was no-one competent who was willing to replace him.

Peter Tlale himself used the tactic of strategic absence very effectively. He attended most of the meetings of the Water Committee and the PSC for the first month or two that I worked in Ga-Rasai. However he refused to participate in task teams and eventually stopped attending the meetings as his relationship with Oriah Manamela deteriorated. This expressed his unwillingness to work with the Water Committee and also brought the legitimacy of its decisions into question. In weakening the links between the Water Committee and the Community Authority this action (or inaction) further undermined the Committee's already tenuous position, seriously endangering the success of the project.

Absence is not without its risks, however, as one can never be sure that people and events might not simply move on regardless. So Peter Tlale did attend one meeting later on just to keep track of what was transpiring. There he found that the plans for the alterations to the community offices had been passed without his approval. He insisted on reviewing the plans and, realising that it would not be a good idea to delay construction and irritate the study team, agreed to them on behalf of the Community Authority in a speech that lasted several minutes. This was clearly a demonstration of his authority, as it implied that without his agreement construction would not have been allowed to go forward.

Strategic absence was also employed on a day to day level by members of the Water Committee when they wanted to avoid an issue. The pump operator, for example, was absent from a couple of meetings when his pumping times and performance were to be discussed. On such occasions Mpho Moitsiwa, of the study team, would ignore the etiquette of absenteeism and send committee members to fetch people in order to resolve the matter there and then. Mpho, as a Tswana himself, understood the political niceties of meetings far better than I did and it was some time before I came to appreciate the strategic significance of his actions.

The importance of absenteeism as a strategy should not be underestimated. In the absence of any power to initiate action or enforce their will, the only weapon available to the people of Ga-Rasai has often been that of impeding the will of others through avoidance. In a context where communication only flows in one direction, silence may still be used by the skilled as

perhaps the only available political tactic. This occurred mainly on a personal and factional level in Ga-Rasai. However the non-payment for services in Bapong, mentioned in the previous chapter, illustrates how entire communities can use this tactic in order to distance themselves from unpopular policies.

Payment is closely related to support and, conversely, non-payment is a form of absenteeism. This is apparent in Kuper's "Case of the Pumpers" (Appendix 2), in which one faction refused to pay their share of the salary for the 'pumper' Merahe, whose employment they opposed. I noticed this tactic in use in Ga-Rasai when I asked people about their use of water. Many people who neglected to pay the monthly fee for water denied using water from the reticulation system. In doing so they implied that they were not just avoiding payment, but also withholding their support for the Water Committee. In making people pay for their water, the prepayment system forced them to tacitly support the water system and, by implication, the structures which were responsible for its administration. This may have been one of the reasons that the prepayment system met with some measure of silent opposition.

In the context of the emphasis placed on participation by developers, strategic absence becomes a powerful political tool. It allows local people to play on the tension between participation and control that was mentioned in the previous chapter. Absence is a way of co-opting a strategy of exclusion. By refusing to participate in a development project local people can effectively derail the process. This was implicitly recognised by the study team which went to great lengths to maintain the committees' involvement in the project, while limiting their real influence. However the strategy did not realise that absence was a deliberate strategy, and that it was used to communicate dissent. The study team might have been less frustrated and better placed to work with the local people if it had better understood the complex and subtle ways in which this tactic was used by the communities with which it worked, and how it fitted into a cosmology which emphasised consensus and unity as the ultimate societal goals.

2.4 Contemporary differences

2.4.1 The effects of globalisation

There is a great deal of continuity, therefore, between the periods and places that Kuper, Schapera and the Comaroffs describe, and Ga-Rasai as it is today. The are also many important differences, however. The context of Ga-Rasai is illuminated by these ethnographies, but by no means does it reflect them.

To begin with, as I have mentioned, Ga-Rasai is far more influenced by outside forces than are the societies described by these writers. This has important implications for self-government as self-reliance is eroded and local affairs are increasingly affected by factors outside of local control. It has been the result of a number of political, social and economic factors including greater penetration of government influence, increased migrancy, better transport and communication infrastructure and rising population densities.

These factors also seem to have led to weakened solidarity within the village as villagers develop ties with different social networks and nexuses in other areas, particularly through migrancy. Alternate values and mindsets have been adopted, sometimes with profound effects on village life. The internalisation of development discourse is only one example of this phenomenon.

In this context consensus-based decision-making is becoming increasingly insufficient to build solidarity in the village. Furthermore, as influential people often work outside of the community, it is difficult to summon a full quorum for consensus, and those who were not involved in any decision may object to it later. Absence may impede decision-making whether or not it is used strategically.

If consensus is not an efficient way of making decisions and it is no longer able to fulfil its secondary functions in a context where the centre cannot hold, it seems likely that its validity will be questioned by outsiders and insiders alike. Indeed, this is exactly what is happening.

2.4.2 Administrative structures

Administrative structures in Ga-Rasai are quite different from those of earlier times. The contemporary structures of administration have developed out of older bodies and the pressures of a changing environment through a process of bricolage.

The most obvious difference between Ga-Rasai and the societies described in earlier ethnographies, in terms of politics and administration, is that there is no *lekgotla* in Ga-Rasai, at least in the traditional sense. Community meetings do take place but they occur less frequently and are less influential than those described by Kuper and Schapera. Many decisions are taken solely by the Community Authority.

The other major component of earlier Tswana village administration, the chief or headman, is also missing in Ga-Rasai. The Chairperson of the Community Authority plays a role as the leader of the community but lacks the traditional or spiritual legitimacy of either of these figures. The role of authority figures has declined throughout South Africa. Traditional leaders have been discredited in many areas as a result of their co-option by the apartheid government.

One of the effects of this is that disputes are more difficult to resolve. Kuper suggests that the headman is important in dampening conflict by acting as a symbol of law, unity and shared values (1971:97). As a leader and figurehead the headman or chief is also in a position to lead the community towards consensus. He may not be able to dictate the course of policy but on the whole the citizens will be less likely to argue with his suggestions. The Chairperson of the Ga-Rasai Community Authority is not in the same position as his legitimacy is far less secure.

The Community Authority is a new structure which embodies elements of the *lekgotla* and elements of the chiefdom but is not legitimated either by community participation or by descent and ancestral sanction. Its lack of transparency further undermines its legitimacy. It is able to conduct itself in this way partly because the decisions which affect the village involve outside parties to a greater and greater extent. Community participation is primarily focussed upon addressing internal matters, which in the past were most important in the village, both in terms of good of the group and in terms of personal gain. The Community Authority can deal with outsiders fairly autonomously. This means that the Community Authority can make important decisions without consulting other villagers, further undermining the role of consensus in local politics. This also gives it greater scope for corruption, a factor which does not seem to have escaped its notice.

The most dramatic example of this was the dispute over the payments made by hunters for hunting upon village land. The villagers were not informed about these payments and the members of the Community Authority embezzled tens of thousands of rands. The villagers had probably assumed that in dealing with outsiders the members of the Community Authority would place the village's interests before their own. When their corruption was finally exposed the villagers were shocked and indignant, and a bitter conflict erupted in the village.

In part the authority of the Community Authority and its Chairperson represent a centralisation of power which is imposed from outside. The Bophuthatswana Government

preferred to deal with only one structure and only one or two people. The present government does much the same thing, although it does not officially recognise any village-level governing structure. From the government's point of view decentralisation of power would only make administration more difficult. Local structures are useful, therefore, in providing village-level administration. However, they are hamstrung by their lack of recourse to any sort of coercive power.

'Committees' are another new form of administrative structure. They allow the Community Authority to delegate some of its responsibilities while maintaining its control. This means that the work of the committees is subject to the same mistrust as is that of the Community Authority, and has the same problems of legitimisation.

The decline of community involvement in its own government seems to be resulting in a higher degree of political manoeuvring outside recognised structures. Kuper found that there was little lobbying and politicking outside the *lekgota* (1971:87). There seemed to be more muttering and dissent in Ga-Rasai, but as an outsider it was difficult for me to gauge the extent of this.

It seems, then, that the political landscape of Ga-Rasai is subject to a number of changes which threaten to undermine the position of consensus and participation which played a central role in Tswana politics in the past. These changes are largely in response to forces at work outside the village itself. However participatory practices and ideals still play a central role in decision-making in Ga-Rasai and their fate is by no means assured. It will be interesting to see how their influence will continue to change as local politics interact with the shifting global context.

3 Conclusion

Participation holds an important position in local discourse, just as it does in the national and international discourses of development. However the local meaning of participation is based on historical and cultural factors which are specific to Ga-Rasai. In order to understand participatory mechanisms one must appreciate the importance of community solidarity in Tswana thinking. This is manifested in an emphasis on group decision-making based on consensus. Participation in Ga-Rasai was about active involvement to demonstrate and reinforce social solidarity. The water project was only the context, not the reason, for participation.

This meant that the local structures responsible for development, and the tools and processes which they used, had different functions for the people of Ga-Rasai than they had for the other parties involved in the project. This is discussed further in Chapter 6 where I shall argue that project meetings were less about water supply than about consensus-building and local political advantage. This was not clearly recognised by each of the parties and it led to some friction and irritation, which ultimately resulted in the study team increasing its control over the project.

However it is not enough to argue that development must be framed only in local terms. If development is to be truly useful, it must help local people to deal with a changing global environment. The failure of local decision-making processes to meet the requirements of this project is part of a regional pattern in which existing local processes are becoming increasingly inappropriate to deal with local needs. In Ga-Rasai the local mechanisms for decision-making, which are closely tied to local models of participation, are slow and inefficient. This is largely because effective decision-making is not their main focus. They are ill-suited to deal with the increasing need for quick and conclusive decisions. There is a real need for outsiders to help the people of Ga-Rasai to find solutions to these problems.

The following chapter continues to discuss the differences between the villagers' and the developers' understandings of the project, and analyses how developers used their position of power to maintain the integrity of their vision. The developers' approach was based upon scientific management principles which stress structured organisation and efficient and effective decision-making. This approach fails to take into account the local emphasis on social solidarity on the one hand, and factional and individual political gain on the other. The developers' objectives for the project also differed from those of the villagers. The study team managed to focus the project upon the fulfilment of these objectives by carefully limiting the extent to which local people could control the course of the project.

Chapter 5: Donors, developers and the context of development

This chapter examines the approach and motivations of the study team and continues to analyse how the study team's understanding of the project differed from that of the people whom the project was intended to help. It also addresses how this understanding informed the design and management of the project. By maintaining control over the project through a number of mechanisms, including some of those discussed in Chapter 2, the study team was able to focus the project towards its own and JICA's objectives, which were not always congruent with those of the people of Ga-Rasai.

Meetings formed the main arena for the interaction of the developers and the people of Ga-Rasai. This chapter analyses how the study team apparently encouraged participation while limiting the extent to which local actors could really influence the project.

1 Organisational culture in the JICA project in Ga-Rasai

The institutional aspect of the JICA project in Ga-Rasai centred around the creation of processes and procedures for effective management. To this end the study team tried to foster a certain type of organisation in Ga-Rasai, both in the sense of a process of organising and in the sense of an organisation as an entity. The team's approach was based very much on Western-style management systems, or what might be termed an 'international common organisational culture'. This may have been influenced somewhat by Japanese management systems but as most of the team members were not Japanese, the team's management style was fairly similar to those that might be found in Europe, America, and much of the rest of the world, including South Africa. Its approach was highly structured and outcome-orientated, based upon rational principles of efficiency and effectiveness. The critical path included in Appendix 3 is evidence of the team's ordered approach to the project. It tried to develop a similar approach in the Water Committee and the PSC. The wisdom and appropriateness of this were never called into question.

Alvesson (1993) disputes the universal validity of such an approach. He argues that scientific management can be located within the dominant modes of thought of late-capitalist Western society. In particular he feels that a preoccupation with managing, organising and efficiency is a peculiarity of Western organisations and is not necessarily fundamental to organisations in other cultures. Here he clearly owes a debt to Foucault who analyses the importance of classification and categorisation in scientific thought. In concerning itself with these things,

Western management ignores a whole host of alternative organising principles, such as independence, expressiveness, creativity, or, in the case of Ga-Rasai, solidarity.

Indeed a number of anthropologists have argued along similar lines, suggesting that any process of organisation is intrinsically cultural (Wright 1994:20) This view of organisation as the product of culture is in sharp contrast to that of the organisational studies writers who tend to write about culture as the product of organisations (Schein 1994, Robbins 1990).

Escobar (1995b:223) has suggested that part of the value of New Social Movements lies in the local character of their organisation, "the new social movements are rhizomic (assuming diverse forms, establishing unexpected connections, adopting flexible structures, moving in various dimensions – the family, the neighbourhood, the region).... Social movements are fluid and emergent, not fixed states, structures and programmes." Although I do not credit Escobar's New Social Movements as role models for the implementation of development throughout the world, and certainly not in Ga-Rasai, they can provide valuable lessons in the diversity of organisational models available in Third World contexts.

The culture of organisation in Ga-Rasai differed from the 'international common organisational culture' in a number of ways. The boundaries of organisations in Ga-Rasai were fairly flexible. In contrast to the study team members, people in Ga-Rasai do not make clear distinctions between the roles and functions of different organisations such as the Water Committee, the PSC, the RDP Forum and the Community Authority. Of course this can be attributed in part to the multiplicity of outside bodies which have unwittingly created overlapping structures in the village for the purposes of development, leading to some confusion regarding their responsibilities.

There is also a great deal of ambiguity regarding the membership of the organisations. Each committee has a list of members, but this often has little to do with the people who are actually involved in the committee's activities. The same name may be used to refer to different organisations. The people of Ga-Rasai seem to have a more nebulous, flexible view of what comprises an organisation than is common in Western conceptions of organisations.

The study team was clearly of the opinion that the structures in Ga-Rasai such as the Water Committee and the PSC were decision-making bodies which were operating ineffectively and could be encouraged to operate more effectively through the design and implementation of more efficient procedures. In fact this was not the case. These committees were not primarily designed to make decisions. As I shall argue in Chapter 6, on the whole the study team was

quite unaware of the significance of meetings for the people who participated in them. The study team was unlikely to succeed in developing more effective processes without taking local objectives and motivations into account.

These differences were the basis for much misunderstanding between the study team and the committees, and resulted in a great deal of frustration. Ultimately this meant that the study team perceived the committees as inefficient and ineffectual and drew more of the responsibility for decision-making onto itself, limiting the participation of the local people in the project.

2 The imposition of structures and processes

The study team's somewhat ethnocentric approach to management can be seen in its introduction of the alien concept of a Project Steering Committee. Of course Ga-Rasai already had a Water Committee, which had been created sometime before (also by outsiders), and a number of other committees, but these did not operate in quite the same way that the study team envisaged for the PSC. The study team had clear expectations about the role of the PSC: it was expected to function as a decision-making body, to act as a link between the study team and the community, and ultimately to contribute to the continuing management of the water system. However the study team did not engage in selecting personnel, structure or rules for the formulation of the PSC but left this to the Community Authority. This was typical of the team's attitude towards participation - the outcomes were clearly defined but it was up to the community to work out how to reach them. The team then blamed the villagers when the committee did not perform as expected. Thus it is reported in the Draft Final Report (JICA 1997:2-10) "the Community Authority originally excluded the Local Water Committee [from the PSC], which caused time-wasting conflict".

The study team failed to realise that there is nothing 'natural' about committees as a form of social organisation, and there was no reason to think that the team's understanding of committees would be shared by the villagers. Ideally the team should have looked for more appropriate forms of organisation. If it felt that it had to attempt to transplant culture then it should at least have attempted to impart its acquired skills at the same time.

It is somewhat ironic that when so many organisations in the West have tried with limited success to transplant aspects of Japanese organisational culture into Western organisations, a Japanese-funded project attempted to do something similar by transplanting a

Japanese/Western structure (it is unlikely that everyone had the same idea about exactly what it was that they were hoping to create) into an African context.

The effectiveness of committees is given short shrift in Western thought anyway. Tropman writes in the introduction to his book Effective Meetings: Improving Group Decision Making "Public references ... repeatedly suggest that groups are collections of the impotent convened to do the impossible" (1996:xix). Perhaps some of the faith in such groups in development thinking can be attributed to the assumption that poor people in the Third World always act in homogeneous concert.

The study team, therefore, tried to create structures and design processes for water management in Ga-Rasai without giving very much thought to the context within which they were trying to do so. Not only were these occasionally superfluous, as when the PSC was created in addition to the Water Committee, but often they were incompatible with the processes and structures already existing in the village. A better understanding of the composition of the village and the framework which underpins village management might have contributed to a project which would have been more successful, although quite different, than the one implemented in Ga-Rasai.

3 The importance of deliverables

An important point of difference between the study team's objectives and the community's objectives for the project, and indeed between the study team's apparent and actual objectives for the project, is highlighted by looking at what the study team was actually expected to deliver. The study team was being gauged not by its success in providing water to the village, nor by its success in developing structures and processes which could ultimately facilitate water management, but by the budgets and reports that it sent to Japan. This had a real impact upon its commitment to the people themselves.

3.1 Reporting

In fairness the emphasis on reporting as an end in itself was more excusable in the case of Ga-Rasai than it might be in other development projects because this project was intended as a pilot study. This meant that its primary objective was to provide lessons and recommendations which could be used in other, similar projects in the area and possibly even in other places.

This in itself is fair enough. However it was not quite what happened in practice. In reality the contents or usefulness of the reports were less important than th fact that they were needed to fulfil the consultants' contractual agreements with JICA. To some extent the need to document mistakes was glossed over in favour of presenting the activities of the consultants in the best possible light. It could well be argued that mere failure should not have mattered as this was a pilot project. A pilot project is a tool for learning, and people learn as much from mistakes as from successes. In playing down its failures the study team undermined the usefulness of the project. Many of my criticisms of the project, particularly regarding problems stemming from the consultants and contractors, the consultants' incomplete conception of local understandings of the project, and problems of interaction between the various parties, were left out of the final report. The reason given for this, and I believe it was largely true, was that the report was "highly structured" and some of the detail could not be incorporated. I interpreted this to mean that the form of the report was more important than its function.

The priority of form over function was also apparent in the management plan that was written for Ga-Rasai. The ostensible purpose of this plan was to facilitate management of the water system by documenting how the system was to be managed and setting out roles and responsibilities for management. It was also expected to form the basis of an agreement between the community of Ga-Rasai, Magalies Water and the Eastern District Council regarding the division of responsibility for water management. A third, but largely unstated purpose of the report was that it would be a form of reporting to JICA.

With some doubt that this plan would fulfil the first of its intended roles, I went ahead and thrashed a four page document out with members of the Water Committee and the PSC. Literacy levels and English language skills are low in Ga-Rasai, so this was the limit of what I thought might be a useful document. It turned out, however, that I had not taken into account the plan's intended function as a reporting instrument. One of the team members advised me "I don't think that [the team leader] really cares what the community thinks [about the management plan], he just wants something to show Mr Sato at JICA". I could sympathise with the position that this was the plan's most important function. I had a suspicion that it would be ignored by the community after my departure. I also felt sure that the relationship between Magalies Water, the Eastern District Council and the community would be agreed upon verbally and in separate documents between the Eastern District Council and Magalies Water with little consultation with the community, and that it would ultimately be finalised in practice.

Accordingly I came up with a ten page management plan that carefully detailed the context and arrangement of the water management system in Ga-Rasai. The community showed no interest in it whatsoever but the study team was happy to include it in the final report. The management plan was due to be presented to the community and the Eastern District Council and signed by both parties at a handover ceremony at the conclusion of the project. This ceremony has not yet taken place and I have no reason to think that it ever will, although I have brought it to the attention of some members of the now-disbanded study team.

3.2 Budgets

The budgets that the study team had to set out in order to acquire funding from Japan formed a major item of reporting. I had very little to do with this but it was clear that the way funds were budgeted for had a great deal to do with the way implementation took place. Once again JICA's and the study team's priorities took precedence over what many would see as the core objective of assisting the villagers to obtain reliable access to water.

This was clearly demonstrated in the discussions regarding the diesel pump. The system of pumping water up from the river using a diesel pump was problematic in a number of ways. The pump was prone to breakdown, which often left the village without reticulated water for days. It also had to be taken down to the river every day by truck or donkey cart, and brought back to the village to prevent theft or vandalism. In addition a pump operator had to be hired to transport and operate the pump every day. This was a demanding job and it was not easy to find someone reliable to fill the position.

The solution proposed by the committees to solve these problems was to replace the diesel pump with an electric pump. This would have the advantage that it would be much less likely to break down, would be easier to fix, and would be less attractive to potential thieves. The pump could be stored securely near the river and operated remotely by the filtration plant operator. This would obviate the need for a pump operator. It would also have the advantage of saving water which overflowed whenever the tanks at the plant became full, as the plant operator could not communicate with the pump operator to tell him to stop pumping. In addition an electric pump would be cheaper to run than the diesel pump.

One problem was that electricity would have to be supplied to run the pump. However a nearby farmer had agreed to allow the village to draw electricity from his farm.

This issue was not addressed by the study team or Magalies Water for some time. It was finally raised about six weeks before the end of the project, when it was quickly resolved by the purchase of a spare diesel pump at the cost of some R35 000, far more than an electric pump would have cost, to replace the current diesel pump when it had to be taken away for repairs.

The reason given for this was that there could be a problem with the location of a pump at a permanent station beside the river as the river was prone to flooding. The pump would have to be buried which would be difficult to do and inconvenient for repairs, and there was a danger of leakage during floods. It turned out, however, that no proper investigation into this had been undertaken. The decision had been rushed through because the team leader had to fly to Japan the next day to report to his superiors. Part of his reporting involved the presentation of budgets. Apparently the budget allocated to Ga-Rasai had not been used up and a lump sum expenditure on a diesel pump would bring the actual costs of the pilot project in line with the planned figures. An electric pump would have cost less and would have taken far more time and planning to install.

This was a case where the benefits to the community had been ignored in favour of the reporting requirements of the study team. It is impossible to say without a proper study, but the eventual decision could well have cost both JICA and the community more in the long run and benefited only the study team.

All of this was rational and scientific, in a sense, but I doubt that it was the best course of action.

3.3 Evaluation

Curiously enough, in the light of the importance given to reporting on the project, there was no evaluation of the project by external evaluators. This was probably because of JICA's standard operating procedures. It would have been useful, however, to have external evaluators review the project in order to provide a fresh, more impartial perspective. This might have highlighted some of the issues that I have raised in this paper, which were not adequately addressed in the final report.

Certainly no-one ever asked the community for its evaluation of the project, even for the final report. The only time that committee members were ever asked for their opinions on the planning and implementation of the project was when I conducted interviews for this paper.

Communication usually flowed from the study team to the committees. Communication which flowed in the opposite direction was largely ignored. At best it was viewed as information but more often it was seen to be a nuisance. Certainly it was never seen as necessitating action.

All of this is not intended to portray the study team simply as a self-interested group concerned only with its own appearance in the eyes of its superiors. I do not feel that this would be an accurate picture. There was a high level of commitment to the success of the project and a real interest in creating a reliable supply of clean water in Ga-Rasai. However there were also occasions where there was a tension between the team's commitment to the people of Ga-Rasai and its commitment to the funders and to its own perceived performance and reputation. On these occasions the people of Ga-Rasai tended not to be the team's first priority.

4 Participation and obstruction

4.1 Participation

"It should also be noted that the management plans were produced by the LPSCs themselves. In many RDP projects, the preparation of business plans is lead by consultants, with limited planning input from communities or their representatives." (JICA 1997:5-1)

For all the language of participation that was bandied about in the course of the project, I was struck by how little contribution was actually made by the members of the committees who were meant to be involved in the decision-making process. Many of the important decisions were made by the leaders of the study team. Some were made in conjunction with Magalies Water at frequent meetings. On the way to one such meeting which I had been asked to attend, I asked whether anyone from the village was invited. It had not occurred to anyone. When I proposed that members of the community should attend I was told, "Well, we can pick up a few people". As it turned out we did not bring anyone from Ga-Rasai, which I suspect was preferable for both the study team and Magalies Water.

Participation was usually thwarted but was used as a justification for virtually any action. According to Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1668), "'Participation' is rapidly becoming a catch-all concept, even a cliché... Conceptual blurring around the terms 'participatory',

'participation' and 'participant' creates a space for a range of applications, as well as for confusion."

In the JICA project people sometimes stretched the limits of this 'range of applications'. During a meeting about tariff setting, I suggested that the management consultant employed to direct the financial aspects of the project meet with the community in order to discuss the tariff and share ideas. He told me, "I would rather meet the community later, after I have organised my ideas and come up with a model, so that the community can really feel that they are part of the process". The logic of this still baffles me.

Meetings, and particularly the weekly meetings held in the village with the Water Committee and the PSC, were an important site of participation, but it must be asked what sort of participation took place. Adnan lists three broad categories of participatory programming (Gardner and Lewis 1996:111). The first is limited to providing information to local people and listening to their points of view. The second category involves the engagement of local people in the project. This might involve using labour from the community, involving the community in planning or future management, and so on. In such cases projects are still under the control of outside forces. The third category involves initiatives that come from the communities themselves.

On the whole, this project would fall into the second of these three categories. This rough categorisation, however, obscures the politics present in the actual workings of participatory mechanisms. The meetings, which were ostensibly intended to encourage the villagers to participate actively in decision-making, in reality existed primarily for information-sharing and the legitimisation of decisions which were made elsewhere. Most of the issues dealt with at these meetings were informative. Mpho Moitsiwa and I would inform the committees about the results of the study team's discussions with other parties, decisions that had been made, and changes to the timeframe for the project. The committee members would raise any issues that they wanted to bring to our attention. These would usually be administrative matters to do with the workings of the committees and the people responsible for operation and administration. Engagement of local people is clearly subject to a wide range of interpretations.

4.2 Levels of decision-making

The kinds of decisions that were left to the community tended to be decisions such as where to place the standpipes, whom to include in the PSC and when the pump operators should be

expected to work. These might be termed second order decisions, mainly administrative matters to be cleared up after the important matters have been decided.

First order decisions, however, were strictly the province of the study team. These included any major infrastructural issues, such as whether to install a prepayment system or replace the diesel pump with an electric one, and of course anything relating to the budget. At most villagers were consulted regarding these issues, although even this was not always the case. I doubt that it ever occurred to the study team that it might give up control entirely, effectively saying, "Here is some money, the following people are at your disposal, what do you want to do with them?"

The degree to which the study team set the terms of the project before it even entered the field is evident in the critical path included in Appendix 3.

4.3 Discourse and power in meetings

Even where important issues were discussed at meetings to which community members were invited, for example at the monthly Project Execution Forum (PEF) meetings, a number of factors inhibited their participation. The meetings were held in English, and followed a formal structure that, although similar to the structure followed at the weekly meetings in the village, must have intimidated the village committee members. Meetings are a learned skill, what Bourdieu (1968) might call a "cultural code". The procedures of meetings, both formal and informal, are practised and perfected by those who are familiar with them. In Foucault's terms they have a discourse of their own which can be used strategically by the skilled in pursuit of their own agendas.

Everyone who participated in these meetings tried to manipulate this discourse to their own advantage, and I suspect that this is true of most such meetings. Certainly local people did not hesitate to turn the discourse of meetings to their own ends. However the advantage clearly lay with the developers who set the terms for the meetings and often chaired them. This relates back to the exclusive discourse of professionalism that was referred to in Chapter 2. In addition the PEF meetings were held in a large and imposing conference room in a government building in Rustenburg, a long distance from Ga-Rasai. The long journey often prevented villagers from attending. It was also difficult for the study team to reimburse the committee members without receipts for their travel, and the minibus taxis on which they travelled to Rustenburg did not give out tickets or receipts.

Even so, in reality these sorts of meetings tended to be more directed at information sharing than at decision-making or debate.

I found myself using my position and the discourse of meetings strategically on a number of occasions. When I wanted to avoid lengthy debate on an issue, for example, I might place it towards the end of a long agenda. When I wanted a clear resolution on an issue, which was often difficult to obtain, I would ask "For the minutes, then, can we say that ...?" As a player in the process it was only to be expected that I should become involved in the political aspects of meetings. In fact meetings were so clearly tactical that I suspect I would have seemed foolish if I had pretended to ignore this.

The manipulation of this discourse allowed the developers to maintain control of what was discussed and decided in meetings. It allowed them to exclude local people from the process even when they were actually present. Mosse (1994) describes how this occurred unintentionally in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) meetings in an agricultural project in western India. There he found that women were effectively excluded from participating in the process. This was in large part because the techniques and approaches that the researchers used were not compatible with the sorts of knowledge and modes of expression that tended to be used by women in the area. In the case of Ga-Rasai it seems that meetings were used to similar effect, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In this way local people were prevented from participating as equals in the planning and implementation of the project.

4.4 Transparency

The team and Magalies Water made little attempt to run the process in a transparent fashion. In fact on occasion it seemed that they were intentionally mystifying the process. Information was provided to the community primarily through Mpho and me. However we were often asked not to give information to the village until decisions had been finalised. After the management consultant finally met with the community, for example, we promised the community that we would keep them informed about the process. However we were then told that we were not allowed to show the community any preliminary outlines of the tariff until it had been finalised by Magalies Water.

This lack of transparency was also apparent in the actions of Magalies Water. Information about water quality was rarely provided to the village. The committee members knew that the water from the boreholes was not safe ("infected with the nitrates") but they did not know that only one was in fact contaminated, or which one it was. Similarly, Magalies Water tested the

water from the standpipes every week towards the end of the project but this information was never, to my knowledge, passed on to the Water Committee or the PSC.

5 Conclusion

The study team kept tight control over the project, allowing the committees little freedom to run the project according to their own understanding of the situation. Participation of local people was restricted in order to maintain control of the project in the hands of the study team and to keep the project focussed upon the developers' understandings and objectives. The villagers were effectively marginalised from the decision-making process in a number of ways. The team retained control over the project by giving little real power to local structures and making most of the important decisions itself. It limited input from the village by restricting access to information and constraining the flow of communication. Its use of formal decision-making mechanisms had the effect of excluding committee members. In maintaining its understanding of the project as the dominant one and ignoring alternative views, the team retained control over the framework and direction of the project, limiting the extent to which the committees could really influence the project.

However the arguments which I have presented here move beyond the grand strategies of domination described in Chapter 2. What I found interesting about this project was not how it fitted into a world-wide strategy for maintaining the global balance of power, but how local agendas, including those of the study team, were incorporated into the project and dictated its course. At the level of a micro-study such as this one, local strategies of self-interest often seem to predominate over the dynamics of global power relations.

The story of Ga-Rasai is not simply one of domination by developers and resistance by the objects of development. If this was the case the villagers might have used the few tools left at their disposal, most notably the strategy of absenteeism, in order to exert more control over the project. The villagers did not seem interested in controlling the project. They were interested in a working water system but hoped that they could rely on the study team to provide that. On the whole they were less concerned with the politics of development than with the prospect that the project might improve their own lives somewhat, ideally with little input from themselves. The following chapter will investigate some of the other reasons for the villagers' participation in the project, reasons that were largely opaque to the study team.



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Chapter 6: Time, literacy, meetings and minutes

Although each of the parties attached a great deal of importance to meetings, they all perceived the significance of meetings differently. I found it curious that none of the parties ever specifically acknowledged these differences in understanding, to my knowledge at least, because they were central to my interpretation of how participation in the project worked in practice.

This chapter investigates the meaning of meetings for the study team, local government and the people of Ga-Rasai. It examines why each party participated in meetings and what they expected to gain from them. It pays particular attention to the importance of meetings for the local people, seeking to understand why people continued to participate in meetings even though they were allowed little real influence over the course of the project itself.

1 The study team's understanding of meetings

In accordance with what I termed in Chapter 5 an 'international common organisational culture', the study team tended to view meetings as a prelude to action. Meetings existed to enable information to be shared and decisions to be taken. Thereafter the real work was to act on the information and decisions obtained in the meetings. When a course of action was decided upon it was expected that it would be followed. If it was not, then the meeting was considered wasted and recriminations would result.

This is not to deny that the study team engaged in meetings on a political level. As I argued in Chapter 5 this was indeed the case. However the study team's approach remained outcome-oriented. Meetings were primarily related to action, and power was usually used to ensure that the action taken was in line with the team's understanding of the process. Although meetings were important sites for the use of power it did not seem that providing space for the exercise of power was their primary function.

2 Local government's understanding of meetings

The meetings that I held with local government had a somewhat different character to those that only involved the study team. Local government officials tended to share with the people of Ga-Rasai the view that meetings are in fact ends in themselves. The prevailing attitude seemed to be that meetings were themselves solutions to problems, rather than a step towards

action. Simply having all of the parties sitting around a table seemed to be seen as an appropriate solution to most problems.

One of the meetings that I held with the Eastern District Council was intended to discuss a number of concerns regarding roles and responsibilities, and operation and maintenance issues. After some discussion the representative of the Eastern District Council, Douglas Maimane, announced that "these problems will be solved by an agreement between the EDC and Magalies". A meeting was tentatively arranged and the matters were considered resolved.

This was in sharp contrast to the study team's approach which tended to result in concrete action plans. I believe that Maimane's approach was greatly influenced by the value placed on consensus-building in Tswana thinking.

Problems with consensus-based decision-making were not limited to the people of Ga-Rasai. It was very clear that there were major political divisions within the EDC, which often seemed to prevent it from taking any actions whatsoever. I also found it interesting that Mpho Moitsiwa, who worked closely with me in my dealings with the council and was himself a Tswana, ascribed more importance to these divisions than I did. When we needed the council to send a financial person to Ga-Rasai to advise the committees on financial training and procedures, I was happy to blunder along, ignoring its internal divisions. Mpho, however, did not want to ask for anyone to be sent to Ga-Rasai until the conflicts within the council had been resolved. Needless to say, by the end of the project the conflicts had not ended and I have no reason to think that they will do so at any time in the near future. It seemed that Mpho was combining the approach of the Ga-Rasai committees and the EDC with that of the study team. He was primarily concerned with outcomes but still felt that they could not be achieved in the absence of consent.

3 Local understanding of meetings

The committee members participated enthusiastically in project meetings. I suspect, however, that although they were concerned with the supply of water to the village, they did not see this as the main purpose of the meetings. The meetings had social and political significance for the local people that was not taken into account in the study team's understanding of the project.

3.1 Consensus building

3.1.1 The power of unity

The people of Ga-Rasai also tended to view meetings as ends in themselves. Again a large part of this can be attributed to the Tswana emphasis on solidarity and consensus-building. The same processes that Kuper identified among the Kgalagari (discussed in Chapter 4) were clearly evident in Ga-Rasai. Decisions had to be agreed to by all parties and even then they were not necessarily binding. Problems were seen to be resolvable only through consensus.

It seems that unity and community solidarity had a magico-religious quality in Ga-Rasai. The need for consensus was placed ahead of the need to implement the water system not because unity was necessarily seen as more important than water but rather because it was assumed that if the community was united, all other problems, including the shortage of clean water, would be quickly resolved or would take care of themselves. This reflects the Comaroffs' finding (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:243) that even problems which are apparently free from human influence, such as droughts, were thought to arise from divisions within the village.

The underlying assumption that problems stem directly from lack of consensus, that they are indicative of divisions within society, came through strongly in my interviews with members of the committees. R D Tlale told me that the study team's greatest contribution to the project was that "when there was conflict they built us again .... Now we are brothers and sisters". This was an assertion that I took with a pinch of salt. Later in the interview he told me that a meeting should be called to tell the community that the water system was their property and they should look after it. "There can never be a problem if ever this thing can be discussed to the community."

Similarly the Secretary of the Water Committee, Cecelia Mohaule, told me that in order to solve the problems with the water system "we must collect all the Water Committee...if we are one [i.e. individuals] we cannot solve our problems, we must be together".

The primary function of a meeting, then, is to achieve consensus and to maintain solidarity. The outcomes of a meeting are less important than the meeting itself. The implication is that if everyone was in agreement there would be no problems. This makes for an interesting comparison with Western understandings of meetings, according to which conflict is often thought to have beneficial effects in stimulating creativity. In Ga-Rasai, at least, conflict

seems to be seen as anything but positive. Strategic absence plays an important role in allowing people to avoid conflict while still registering opposition.

Taking decisions as a group, and particularly if this group encompasses all of the citizens, also means that it is more difficult to allocate blame. It was partly for this reason, I suspect, that people often tried to avoid involvement in task teams – not because they wanted to express their dissatisfaction through strategic absence, but because they did not want to be seen to be the ones responsible for taking decisions or making suggestions that might end in disaster. Even if it did not end in disaster, acting unilaterally may identify an individual as a scapegoat.

3.1.2 Problems with a consensus-based approach

The problems that Kuper identifies with a decision-making process based on consensus were even clearer in Ga-Rasai than in Kuper's experience with the Kgalagari. Until consensus is reached no progress can be made. In addition, decisions only remain as long as there is consensus. When cracks appear in consensus the issue must be revisited. The importance of strategic absence, which was discussed in Chapter 4, is that it allows people subtly to undermine consensus, and to reserve their right to revisit an issue at a later date. This makes it very difficult to reach lasting decisions, especially on controversial issues.

Tropman identifies a tension between decision-making and solidarity. "Paradoxically, many decision groups actually seek to avoid decisions..., there is a fundamental tension between maintaining group cohesion on the one hand and taking action on the other. Decision making tears at the cohesion of the group. Because groups sense this, they seek to avoid decision" (1996:29). Tropman is writing for the benefit of Western managers, who are often likely to emphasise decision-making at the expense of unity. In Ga-Rasai, where group cohesion is far more important than decision-making, the tendency to avoid decisions was extremely strong.

The issue of water, itself an important resource, was tied up with those of money and employment. As a result it was highly contentious. Furthermore, deep political divisions virtually hamstrung any attempts to reach decisions in meetings. Committee members preferred not to make decisions on their own initiative and even fairly minor issues were taken to community meetings for discussion. However many members of the community strategically avoided these meetings in order to demonstrate their opposition to the Community Authority. In one community meeting that I attended there were fewer than 30 people present. Several hundred people were entitled to attend. The purpose of this meeting

was to inform people about the tariff structure and the operation of the system (ostensibly the purpose was discussion, but in reality the study team had made most of the important decisions). Needless to say when the system was finally implemented many people complained that they had not been informed about these issues.

Curtis (1985:110) suggests a useful approach to the problem of factional disputes over valuable resources. Instead of fighting the system or trying to replace it, projects should be designed with the local cultural context in mind in order to make decision-making easier. Thus he recommends, for example, that in Sotho-Tswana areas unitary resources, such as a reticulated water system, should be avoided in favour of multiple resources, such as individual boreholes, as they are less likely to create 'winner takes all' situations which will lead to factional disputes. This would not have been a valid solution in Ga-Rasai but it does indicate how a sensitivity to the dynamics of local structures and processes can inform planning which will be better matched with local realities.

As problems tended to be papered over rather than being fully resolved, the same issues would crop up again and again in committee meetings. The issue of pumping times and payment for the pump operator, for example, was raised in one form or another at approximately half of the meetings that I attended. Similarly the question of the relative positions of the PSC and the Water Committee was 'resolved' a number of times, only to reappear every time a letter arrived addressed to one or other of them. In this context it was very difficult to get anything done.

As meetings were seen as ends in themselves I found that even when decisions were reached it was very difficult to get anyone to act upon them. We would discuss the management plan, for example, at length, electing people to write it and deciding upon terms of reference. The meeting would end and everyone would leave with a sense of a job well done. By the next meeting the following week no-one would have completed the tasks agreed upon. When people value the reversible nature of decisions, it is not surprising that they avoid actually putting them into practice.

Thus it seemed that local processes were inadequate to deal with the project's requirements for rapid decision-making and the efficient completion of tasks. In part this can be seen as a flaw in the project's design. It is also, however, an indication that such processes are not well suited to the global environment that is making increasing demands upon the people of Ga-Rasai. The task team may well have been justified in viewing decision-making skills as an

area where capacity should be increased, although it failed to realise how this task was limited by the central role of consensus and unity in the Tswana worldview.

3.2 Power and entertainment

The importance of consensus casts light on decision-making and explains the social role of meetings, but it does not explain why meetings were so well attended. I believe that this can largely be attributed to reasons of self-interest.

3.2.1 Meetings and village politics

One of the main reasons that people attended and participated in these meetings was that they were arenas for the demonstration and contest of power. As cultural codes to be manipulated by the skilled and the powerful, they provided members of the community with the opportunity to flex their political muscles through tactics such as oratory, display of skills and experience, demonstration of factional support and, of course, absenteeism.

The struggles between kinship factions, such as the Madalanes and the Tlales, were played out in the weekly meetings as much as they were in community meetings and in everyday life. An acrimonious dispute occurred over R D Tlale's allocation of incidental paid labour offered by the contractor. The Madalane faction accused Tlale of favouring his own kin and allies, and the dispute nearly ended in blows.

Individual power struggles were also fought in these weekly meetings. The most important of these was the conflict between Oriah Manamela and Peter Tlale. Manamela tried to maintain as much control as possible over the water system, acting as both Chairperson of the Water Committee and filtration plant operator, and trying to fill other positions with his allies where possible. Peter Tlale resented Manamela's attempts at control and made a number of speeches emphasising that the Water Committee reported to the Community Authority. Eventually he withdrew his support from the Water Committee and demonstrated this by absenting himself from further meetings.

These power struggles were entangled with relations and contests of power which spread throughout village life. The Water Committee's relationship with the community was coloured by its association with the Community Authority, which had little support because of its alleged misappropriation of the proceeds from hunting. In turn, the Water Committee's relationship with the Community Authority was strained by the relationship between

Manamela and Tlale. So when the PSC was established Peter Tlale selected R D Tlale, who was a close relative, to chair it. This was an attempt to isolate Manamela. Manamela also had an uneasy relationship with the community. He was a marginal figure, an outsider who had married into the community and had little popular support, but was tolerated because of his technical and administrative skills.

It was impossible to separate water management from factional and personal allegiances and disputes within the village. This was clearly demonstrated when John Madalane, who had psychological problems and was not well-liked in the village, took over responsibility for pumping water from the river. At around the same time the water began to smell bad. Magalies Water said that this resulted from the positioning of the intake pipe saying that it was too close to the bank of the river where there was a great deal of algae. Many of the villagers, however, alleged that Madalane had poisoned the water, which may well have been a veiled suggestion that he was involved in witchcraft.

Madalane and Manamela were both marginal figures, although in different ways, and both were continually in danger of being cast as scapegoats whenever things went wrong. Both were blamed on a number of occasions for problems with the water supply and, perhaps more importantly, for divisions within and between the committees which prevented them from reaching consensus. John Madalane's sister-in-law Christina, an outspoken woman with an engaging manner, a forceful personality and a fiery temper, told me that "we never fight when that man [Madalane] is not around." Certainly it was true that Madalane had a disruptive effect on the meetings, but it would hardly be accurate to attribute all of the disputes which occurred in meetings to his influence. Similarly the frequent breakdown of the water system and the lack of popular support for the Water Committee were often blamed on Manamela, although on the whole he had little influence over these problems.

Project meetings, then, were conducted within a local political framework which is fundamental to life in Ga-Rasai. Kuper's "Case of the Pumpers" (Appendix 2) illustrates that political divisions can be so important and can paralyse decision-making to such an extent, that even a social asset as important as a system for the supply of clean water may be allowed to collapse while groups and individuals pursue their political interests. This could well occur in Ga-Rasai. Towards the end of my involvement in Ga-Rasai, Peter Tlale threatened to elect a new Water Committee. It was clear that he considered the skills that the committee members had acquired through experience and through capacity-building exercises to be less important than his political interests.

Unfortunately the limitations of my research meant I was not able to investigate local politics as closely as I would have liked, but it was clear that it was impossible to understand the dynamics of water management without an appreciation of these struggles for power. The scientific management approach of the study team did not facilitate an understanding of these local contests.

3.2.2 Interpreting the politics of meetings

An exchange between Oriah Manamela and Peter Tlale illustrates how local meaning underlies minor events within the context of project meetings.

Not long after I joined the project, before Tlale began to absent himself from project meetings, Manamela nominated Tlale as a member of a task team for the development of a management plan, saying that Tlale was a "good somebody". Tlale excused himself from this nomination, saying that he was too busy. This exchange seemed fairly simple, and I thought little of it at the time. Later, however, I realised that it cannot be understood without an appreciation of the importance of consensus in Ga-Rasai.

In nominating Tlale, Manamela was trying to force him to demonstrate commitment to the JICA project, and, therefore, to the activities of the Water Committee. He was placing Tlale in a position where he had to declare his allegiance, effectively asking, "Are you in or are you out?". In declaring that Tlale was a "good somebody" he was softening this challenge and also, perhaps, offering Tlale an olive branch.

Tlale, however, had no intention of participating in a task team. By doing this he would implicitly support the project and sanction Manamela's Water Comm..tee. Such a public involvement would make it difficult for him to distance himself from the Water Committee and its running of the project later on. In rejecting involvement in the task team he was effectively withholding his support and reserving his right to criticise Manamela and the Water Committee. It was shortly after this that he stopped attending the weekly meetings altogether.

An outsider would not fully appreciate this exchange. Developers would assume, as I did at the time, that it indicated a lack of commitment to the project, and would become frustrated with the villagers. In fact it had little to do with the project itself, but was part of a continuing political contest. Without understanding the dynamics of local politics one cannot hope to understand Tswana conceptions of participation in development.

3.2.3 Entertainment

In addition to their political ramifications, or perhaps because of them, weekly meetings provided a great deal of entertainment for both political actors and observers. I believe that in the end this was one of the major reasons that people attended the weekly meetings. Some people said scarcely a word in the meetings but were present every week. They were there less to participate in or even observe the implementation of a water system than to observe the meetings themselves. This was a source of entertainment as well as a way of keeping an eye on their own personal and factional interests.

Most of the committee members were unemployed or retired, few of them were involved in agriculture, and so they had little to do for most of the week. Once a week they could observe or participate in local politics, talk and argue for an hour or two, meet with outsiders and study their peculiar preoccupations, and perhaps even have the opportunity to make a bit of money on the side. The study team was mistaken if it thought that water management and effective decision making were the primary purposes of these meetings.

3.3 Debates and narratives

Another of the ways in which the decision-making process in Ga-Rasai differed from Western approach of scientific management was in the apparent disinclination of the people involved in it to compartmentalise issues into easily manageable units. This meant that a single decision would branch out into a lengthy debate. Often the discussion would diverge from the original issue to the extent that it would be lost sight of altogether. Because everything was seen to be interconnected with everything else it was very difficult to resolve anything effectively.

Of course this is not peculiar to Ga-Rasai. Tropman, writing to assist managers working within the Western scientific framework, cites Cohen and March who warn that decisions tend to become "Christmas trees" – "one decision can become a place to hang all other decisions, amendments, and emendations. Rather than partializing the problem, decisions become overloaded" (1996:6). According to scientific management principles, which are concerned mainly with outcomes, this is not conducive to what Tropman terms "quality decisions". This is more pronounced in Ga-Rasai where the emphasis is not on 'quality decisions' to produce outcomes but on 'quality interaction' to develop solidarity.

Similarly answers to questions tended to develop into narratives, bringing in historical events and relationships. This commonly happened whenever I asked the question "has there been water in the pipes this week?"

Typically Manamela, who was the filtration plant operator as well as the Chairperson of the Water Committee would answer, "Oh yes." "All week?" "Well there was no water on Monday because Robert [the pump operator] was away. He started pumping again on Tuesday." Then a long discussion would commence about what should happen when the pump operator had to leave the village.

After some time I would manage to get the discussion back to my original question. Then someone would say, "But there was no water in the pipes on Tuesday afternoon". Someone else would reply, "There was a lot of leaking by the standpipe near the graveyard and Samuel [the plumber] was not around to fix it. He was meant to fix it yesterday but we have not seen him." "So there was no water yesterday either?" Manamela would hotly deny this and the point would be argued with others who claimed to have tried the taps to no avail. Then Robert would say "We pumped a bit and there was some water in the pipes but the leak was very bad so...." And a further discussion would commence ranging from Samuel's responsibilities to those of the pump and filtration plant operators, and end up in an argument about whether anyone should be paid for days when no pumping took place. Often I would give up trying to work out when in fact water was available from the system.

3.4 Minutes

The introduction of minutes was seen by committee members as an important part of the new meeting procedures introduced by JICA. An analysis of a set of minutes can be found in Appendix 1.

Kuper addresses the question of records of *lekgota* meetings among the Kgalagari. "[T]here are no records of most of the decisions taken by the lekgota. The District Commissioners insist that the court-scribe records the main details of court-cases, and when levies are made collections are often recorded, but the decisions of the lekgota on matters of policy are not written up. Many citizens have commented to me on the need for such records, but their absence allows greater freedom in the making and breaking of political alliances, as well as permitting individuals to plead ignorance of decisions they disapprove of, advantages of which they are aware." (1971:86-87)

The recording of events limits flexibility regarding past decisions, making it more difficult to return to the same issues over and over again. By recording decisions, writing effectively freezes them in time. This threatens the policy that decisions remain in force only as long as everyone still agrees.

In Ga-Rasai the minutes were the focus of a great deal of attention at the beginning of each meeting, but it was not entirely clear whether this was because past events were recorded in a fairly inflexible form or because they formed an important and tangible part of the formal structure of meetings.

In theory minutes should have added a more linear element to the meetings and to a certain extent this was true. Occasionally somebody would refer to previous minutes when revisiting an old argument, such as the relationship between the Water Committee and the PSC. Oriah Manamela was one of the few who did this on a number of occasions, as he was aware of the strategic value of the minutes. As a result of his experience working for a large pharmaceutical company before his retirement he was more accustomed to the use of minutes as a tool in meetings than were the other members of the committees.

Manamela was also very circumspect about being quoted in the minutes, realising that minutes also make it easier to identify who said what and to allocate blame. As a relative outsider to the village, and therefore according to Kuper a prime candidate to be a scapegoat (1971:97), he was particularly aware of this. On one occasion a JICA roadshow, comprising several important JICA employees visiting from Japan, arrived to view the progress in Ga-Rasai. A meeting was held in the community hall to discuss the project. After extensive introductions Manamela was asked to speak about cost recovery. Manamela, who unfortunately had just had an argument with O.B. Mpachoe from Magalies Water and had probably had several drinks already that morning, jumped to his feet and began, "No, I do not want to say anything because then it will be in the minutes with my name – Manamela, Manamela, Manamela .... People will say Manamela is complaining about cost recovery ... and my name is flying all around the country in the minutes ...."

After a minute or so in this vein he sat down to an uncomfortable silence and the baffled stares of the Japanese.

On the whole, however, the minutes were only rarely referred to when issues re-emerged. Reading through the minutes of meetings one can find the same issues emerging over and over again – for example the relationship between the Water Committee and the PSC, the

payment of the pump operators, and working hours. An element of linear progress may have been introduced but the nature of events remained largely circular. In time this may change. In an interview the Secretary of the Water Committee did tell me that the device of minutes was useful for remembering "something we have forgotten".

Ultimately, when meetings are not seen to be about progress but about repetition, about following a form and expressing continuity, they can not easily be used to facilitate linear change. Currently minutes seem to be more to do with form, with reiteration of the meeting structure, than with content. Each meeting, and each set of minutes which is produced and read, is not a new event but a re-expression of the same event. In this sense Ga-Rasai behaves as what Levi-Strauss terms a "cold" society (1962:233). "Cold" societies attempt to "annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity in a quasi-automatic fashion" rather than accepting it as "the moving power of their development" (1962:234). The way in which this is done "consists not in denying the historical process but in admitting it as a form without content. There is indeed a before and an after but their sole significance lies in reflecting each other." (1962:235) This is a rather extreme view of the processes at work even when Schapera, and later Kuper, carried out their fieldwork among the Tswana. However it does shed light upon the distinctly circular nature of events apparent in these ethnographies and in my study of Ga-Rasai.

Interestingly, Levi-Strauss sees the maintenance of archives of one sort or another as an important feature of a "hot" society, that is, a society which acknowledges the historical, unilinear nature of change. "The virtue of archives is to put us in contact with pure historicity" (1962:242). In Ga-Rasai this is not quite the case, as even the minutes themselves tend to be more important as form than as function. As Manamela and others demonstrate, this is not always true and may be changing. The introduction of devices such as minutes may assist this change but if they are used as the developers intended it is more likely that this will be as the result of wider changes than that such change occurs through their use.

This shift from a "cold", static view of life to a "hot", dynamic view which takes change into account can be seen as a local adaptation to the increasingly pervasive global context. Whereas the local is "cold", concerned with unity and consensus, the global is "hot", concerned with action and change. Written records are part of the globalisation of Ga-Rasai not only because they are artifacts of an international culture of meetings but, more importantly, because they are linked to linear conceptions of time.

A way of thinking based on orality differs in a number of other ways from one based on literacy. This is not the place for a complete discussion of this issue, but it is possible that the taking of minutes could stimulate a degree of reflection and analysis that was formerly not common in the Tswana approach to meetings. Writing tends to distil thought and can encourage the extraction of conclusions from meandering discussions. In a small way, the adoption of minutes can even encourage meetings to become more action-oriented. Again, this is not to say that the use of minutes in meetings will itself make radical changes to Tswana thinking, but it may help to determine the shape of some local adaptations to global pressures.

4 Conclusion

The study team tended to view the processes which it tried to implement in Ga-Rasai as fairly straightforward. As it turned out, however, the same processes had very different implications for the different parties, implications which had real impact upon the way the project was understood and interpreted, and ultimately upon how it developed in practice.

The interests of local people in the project had comparatively little to do with water management or even with control over the project itself. Local actors were concerned with expressing the central social values of unity and solidarity, maximising their personal political and economic gain from the project, and managing the tension between the two.

An analysis of the meetings highlights these conflicting local agendas and demonstrates how they result in a local understanding of participatory processes that is in fact quite different from that of the study team. As a result the way in which local participants engaged in meetings was also different. They tended to avoid making decisions or taking action in the interests of community solidarity. Meetings tended to be loosely structured, unfocussed and repetitive. Within this framework the meetings were used as arenas for the exercise and contest of power, complete with gladiators, audience, and the occasional martyr to be thrown to the lions.

This analysis also uncovers some of the fundamental changes that are taking place in Ga-Rasai, and indeed in much of South Africa. The forces of globalisation are putting pressure on the villagers to develop more efficient decision-making mechanisms which will respond more rapidly to change. At the same time they are undermining the viability of consensus and solidarity as organising principles. As a result, consensus-based decision-making is becoming

even less effective as a decision-making mechanism, but also failing to fulfil its core function of fostering social cohesion.

There is a tension, therefore, between managing development according to local processes to respond to local interests and objectives, as Escobar suggests (Chapter 2), and using outside skills and knowledge to help local people to deal more competently with an external environment for which their existing tools may be inadequate. Escobar's arguments and my analysis of the use of power within this project (Chapter 5) indicate the dangers of taking a broader, externally orientated view of development at the expense of local meaning. However development practitioners cannot ignore the pressures placed on localities such as Ga-Rasai by global forces which are largely beyond their control. Balancing the demand for local suitability against the demand for global relevance is perhaps the greatest theoretical problem in the study of development. A theoretical approach which is based on the interaction between the global and the local can account for this tension but it does not present any simple solutions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

1 Power and participation in the project

Regardless of the language of participation that was spouted by all of the parties involved in the project in Ga-Rasai, there were real limits upon the degree to which local people were actually able to plan, implement and drive the project.

Power relations within the project were an important constraining factor. The study team controlled the finances and the design of the programme. The language that was used was very technical and effectively excluded local people from contributing. In reality the committee members who were responsible for managing the initiative at the local level were only allowed to make decisions on fairly minor issues. I found many of Escobar's criticisms of development very useful to my understanding of the dynamics of control over the project, particularly those regarding the exclusive effects of development discourse which is based upon scientific knowledge and a strategy of 'modernisation'. However at the local level I am less concerned with his criticisms of development as a mechanism for maintaining the hegemony of the First World than with the local effects of the developers' lack of regard for the villagers' perceptions of the processes and structures of development.

The study team maintained control, in large part, because its understanding of the project differed from local understandings. Whether or not the team was explicitly aware of this, it realised that local bodies could not be relied upon to fulfil its objectives, and so limited their control over the process.

In addition, however, the ability of the local people to engage in the project was limited simply because they did not have the necessary skills and knowledge. It could well be argued that the project was designed in such a way that the developers' skills and knowledge were essential but the local people could make little contribution. The developers used the shortage of capacity in the village to justify the exclusion of committee members from important decisions. Of course the donors and developers never considered how local knowledge and skills could be useful to the project. The programme was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Although this is a valid line of argument it is not a complete picture of the dynamics of Ga-Rasai. The project was also designed in this way as a result of pressures from the wider environment in which Ga-Rasai is situated. These factors include the need to fit into a

national system of water management, competition for resources, national and international timeframes for development, and so on. These were factors over which the developers had little control. Within this context there were indeed gaps in the knowledge and skills of local people which hindered their ability to contribute to the project.

2 The interaction of the global and the local

The team's understanding of how development should operate can be located within a national context, a context in which Ga-Rasai is inextricably embedded. It is not enough to say that the people of Ga-Rasai must find their own way of doing things, because their existing knowledge base may not be appropriate to what is happening in the broader context. Local efforts may well collapse under pressures which are not controllable from within Ga-Rasai.

On the other hand, efforts which do not take local understandings into account are even more likely to fail. Local actors will be unwilling or unable to give them the support that they need. More importantly, imported approaches may not be compatible with those existing in the local setting. This occurred in Ga-Rasai when processes which were introduced by developers to promote change conflicted with internal processes which acted to prevent it.

The role of developers, and particularly anthropologists in development, is to find a way to accommodate diverse approaches and understandings. This is a difficult task, and if the study team did not succeed in addressing it, this was not because it did not try but rather because it underestimated the complexity of the problem.

The value of a view of development that is framed in the relationship between the global and the local is that it avoids the pitfalls of both the modernist, technically-based approaches of the developers, which gloss over the political implications of development, and the more sophisticated post-structuralist arguments favoured by Escobar and others, which tend to reduce development to relationships of power. It is important to account for the role of power, but it is equally important to understand the need for localities such as Ga-Rasai to respond to global pressures for change, and the role that outsiders can play in facilitating this change.

It is almost certain that the people of Ga-Rasai will survive in their changing environment, and even adapt to it. However it is the role of the developers to make this process of adaptation as comfortable and beneficial as possible for the villagers and for other parties with

a stake in the development of this small corner of the Third World. The fact that such stakeholders might come from as far away as Japan is an indication of the global nature of the social context within which Ga-Rasai is situated.

3 A broader understanding of participation

A number of factors, then, limit the extent of the participation of villagers in the running of the project. However a view of participation which begins and ends with engagement in and control over project activities is a very narrow one. Although it is used by the detractors of development as much as by its proponents, it is a view which takes as its starting point developers' conceptions of what participation is about.

Contrary to what one might expect from reading much anthropology of development writing, the local people were not really interested in controlling the project, or even participating in it to any great extent. The study team did employ strategies which were aimed at maintaining its control, but this does not justify an interpretation which is based simply on domination and resistance. The villagers' agendas were completely different from those of the developers, they were not really interested in resisting the developers' control. Indeed, the developers felt that it was necessary to encourage the villagers to take an interest in the project.

A greater awareness of cultural factors such as the importance of consensus in local understandings of participation would have given developers a much better idea of the logic that underpinned local decision-making processes. This would have made it easier for them to understand what was achievable within the limitations of the project, and how the energies and resources of the villagers could best be harnessed for the creation of a sustainable water project.

For their part, the villagers were very happy that outside 'experts' were willing to spend time and money trying to improve the water supply in Ga-Rasai. They assumed, with some justification, that these 'experts' would be better able to take care of most aspects of the project. To a certain extent the villagers may have had the wool pulled over their eyes but they certainly never presumed that the study team was infallibly competent. On the whole they felt that the study team could run the project better than they could and they were happy to leave most of the project to the team as long as they could contribute to decisions which affected them directly, such as where pipes were to be laid, who would be responsible for administration, and how much the administrator would be paid.

The local view of participation had comparatively little to do with the project itself. Instead participation was understood within the framework of local politics. This involved the pursuit of social and individual objectives that the developers did not consider to be related to the project, if they were aware of them at all. Within this framework local people participated a great deal and emphasised the importance of participation. Participation in meetings represented the enactment of social ideals of unity and solidarity through the pursuit of consensus. At an individual level it allowed the powerful to contest and demonstrate their power for their own political advantage and for the entertainment of others.

The people of Ga-Rasai, then, did not see the project in terms of Escobar's binary power relation between the developers and the developed. It was certainly not a struggle between the two to impose or retain models of participation. The study team may have tried to impose a certain model, but this was never really perceived as a threat because it addressed issues which were quite different from those which interested the villagers. From the point of view of the people of Ga-Rasai it was usually more accurate to see the developers as providing a backdrop for local political action. The project meetings created a stage which the local people were delighted to use for the acting out of local dramas. So the study team and the villagers were in fact talking past each other, each pursuing their own agendas while unaware of or ignoring the other's. This might be termed a "working misunderstanding" (Sahlins 1985:61) in that each understood the processes of the project differently but managed to use them to fulfil their diverse objectives.

The gap between the two parties' interpretation of the significance of the project that allowed each to pursue its objectives unhindered by the other. Local people managed to hold meetings to facilitate local politicking, while the developers managed to decide the course of the project without local interference. Only the anthropologist might be concerned that local actors should have put away their local political interests in order to contest the developers' control over the project.

The following table selectively compares the study team's understanding of and objectives for the process to those of the villagers:

Study Team	People of Ga-Rasai
Objectives for the project	
Fulfil contract, impress partners and funders, improve water supply	Build consensus, gain local political advantage, entertainment, improve water supply
Decision-making processes	
Aim to produce decisions	Aim to produce consensus
Series of discrete decision-making processes	Continuous process of consensus-building
Decisions result in action	Consensus results in solidarity
Decisions are permanent	Decisions are flexible
Power and participation	
Power used to control project	Power used for local political advantage
Villagers engage in project activities	Villagers engage in politics
Participation for ownership and responsibility	Strategic absence to avoid responsibility
Silence means consent (exclusion)	Silence means dissent (strategic absence)
Participation of less powerful reinforces inequalities	Less powerful participate for entertainment
Project-related employment	
Payment for work	Personal income
Formal elements of meetings	
Form encourages progress, change	Form encourages standardisation, stasis

These are generalisations for the purpose of comparison. They are not intended to imply that all study team members or all villagers understood things in the same way, or that they always acted as they might be expected to. This table is merely a reflection of some general trends.

4 Past, present and future

In many ways the project in Ga-Rasai was successful. At the time of my departure from the field the village had a water system which dispensed clean water. The prepayment system was gradually being adopted. Only about 40 of the 165 households had purchased tokens at the time of my departure, but the prepayment system was only implemented in the last week of the project. The people responsible for the administration of payments and for the operation of machinery had all been given training and had a clearer idea of how to carry out their responsibilities and respond to occasional crises.

Perhaps most importantly, the study team succeeded in strengthening links between the village and Magalies Water, and to a lesser extent between the village and the Eastern District Council. This provided the Water Committee with somewhere to turn in the event of a crisis. The extent to which the people of Ga-Rasai can depend on these bodies for help remains in question, but any access to support was certainly an improvement on the situation prior to the study team's involvement, when the Water Committee had no idea what help was available or whom to contact when it was needed.

Where the project failed, however, was in building effective decision-making structures in the village. To some extent the introduction of mechanisms such as the taking of minutes may have encouraged people to take a more directed approach to decision-making. However the study team failed to appreciate how the apparently inefficient local processes were rooted in deep-seated cultural values of unity and solidarity, and in the tendency for important issues to become mired in factional disputes.

This was a serious oversight. At the end of the project the water system was still in a very precarious position. Few people had bought tokens, the administration of the system had not been properly tested, the prepayment meters were still prone to breakdown, and the Water Committee had little support from the Community Authority or the rest of the community. This was the time when firm leadership and effective decision-making would be most crucial to the success of the system.

A better appreciation of the intricacies of decision-making in Ga-Rasai might have allowed the team to develop ways to make decision-making more efficient. Failing that, it could at least have allowed the team to account for local inefficiencies in the design of the project.

Only time will tell whether local structures, with the help of supporting organisations such as Magalies Water and the Eastern District Council, will be able to keep the water system on track and make it a useful and sustainable asset to the community. This is possible, if the community can reach beyond its local political differences to work for its collective good, but there is a real danger of the system collapsing under the strain of factional disputes and personal enmity. There is a precedent for this in Kuper's ethnography of the Kgalagari (Appendix 2). As Ga-Rasai moves from a local circular model of the nature of events to a global linear model of time based on the inevitability of change, it remains to be seen if forces from inside and outside the village can prevent Ga-Rasai from re-enacting the disintegration of a locally managed water system that Kuper observed among the Kgalagari in the 1960s.

Appendix 1: Analysis of a set of minutes

Ga-Rasai

JICA Project Steering Committee Meeting

Agenda: 7 August 1997

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Minutes of Previous Meeting
3. Matters Arising
4. Task Team Report Back: Terms of Reference for Operation and Maintenance Plan
5. Elect Task Team to Develop Operation and Maintenance Plan
6. Update on Contractor's Activities
7. Additional Matters

JICA Study Team on Magalies Water
Minutes of Meeting held with Ga-Rasai Community
Ga-Rasai, 07 August 1997

Objective/Purpose

- Report back from the task team responsible for developing the Terms of Reference for the Operation and Maintenance Plan
- Elect a task team responsible for developing the Operation and Maintenance Plan
- Report on the progress of the contract work in Ga-Rasai

Matters arising in the meeting

1. The terms of reference for the Operation and Maintenance Plan were not completed. It was agreed that a task team would be elected which would work from draft terms of reference provided by Mr Burke. These terms of reference could be adjusted as needed.

2. The task team was elected as follows:

   Jacob Monaisa (Water Committee)
   Oriah Manamela (Water Committee)
   Christina Madalane (PSC)
   Zacharia Masinya

3. It was reported that the diesel pump required a service. This was reported to Mr Van der Waalt of Magalies Water on 6 August 1997 during his visit to Ga-Rasai.

4. The contractor has started work but has made little progress so far.

5. A number of questions were noted regarding the contractor's activities:

- Will a separate room be built for the computer?
- What security will be put in place for the computer?
- When will construction of the room occur? It was noted that the room must be completed before the computer arrives.
- What will happen when metres are built but the system is not yet operational?

Mr Burke agreed to find out the answers to these questions.

6. It was noted that the contractor must give the community notice before starting construction on the office so that people can be selected at a good time to provide labour.

7. A concern was noted that RD Tlale did not consult with the PSC before hiring people to move the cement when it arrived. RD Tlale undertook to contact the PSC in future before making decisions.

8. It was noted that RD Tlale must use the list of people looking for work, complied by the PSC, when employing people. The committee members decided to resolve this issue privately after the meeting with JICA was over.

9. The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 14 August at 10:00.

Analysis of the minutes

This is a real set of minutes of a committee meeting that was held in Ga-Rasai. I have also included the agenda for the meeting. The minutes are shorter than most, as there were few issues to be discussed and the meeting ended prematurely in an acrimonious debate. In addition there is no attendance list. Otherwise they are fairly typical of the minutes of these meetings.

General features

As I wrote the minutes myself every week, they demonstrate my approach to meetings and minutes as well as reflecting general features of the meetings and of the project itself.

My approach:

I used the minutes mainly as a tool to crystallise issues. For this reason points were stated very blandly. In fact these were often the outcomes of lengthy and tortuous debates, which I tended to leave out of the minutes for clarity and for ease of reading. As a result it is not possible to discern many of the political issues that I have addressed in the body of this paper simply by reading the minutes.

I tried not to use names in the minutes wherever possible, as I did not want the minutes to be used as a means for finding scapegoats. Nor did I want people to avoid participating for fear of becoming a scapegoat.

Features of the project:

One can see that few important decisions were made at these meetings. Most decisions were taken not about the project itself but around it. Therefore there was never any discussion of the budget, or of how the project should take its course. The discussion centred around local management issues, within the project framework developed by the study team.

The dissemination of information was an important function of the meetings. Project information would be given to the committee members by Mpho Moitsiwa, or occasionally by myself. As Mpho was not present for this meeting and I had not spoken to the rest of the study team in Pretoria, there was little information to be given to the committee members in this meeting. We also took the committees' questions and concerns back to the study team.

Features of the meetings and minutes:

The minutes were usually presented in English. Occasionally Mpho would translate them into seTswana but this did not seem to prove very useful as many people preferred to read in English.

The form of the meetings was given a great deal of significance. The agenda was considered important, although it was rarely adhered to beyond the 'Matters Arising'. In this case the agenda was followed, more or less, because there were not many issues that needed to be discussed. The minutes were carefully analysed, although more for typographical errors and errors of form than for errors of content. I forgot to keep an attendance list of this meeting, which was commented on when the minutes were presented at the next meeting.

Detailed analysis

Points 1 and 2:

According to JICA's schedule for the project, a task team was to be selected to write terms of reference for an Operation and Maintenance Plan. These terms of reference would be presented to the committees for approval, and then another task team would be selected to design the plan.

As a strategy this had its merits, as small groups tended to be more focussed than large groups. However it was still very difficult to get these groups to produce anything. This, I believe, was largely because people did not think that these activities were particularly useful. I found that unless I met with task team members and facilitated the discussion, nothing would be done.

In this case I had left it to Mpho to facilitate the terms of reference, but he had not been able to do so. I suspected that this might happen and brought along a model, just in case.

As it turned out, I decided that a single Operation and Maintenance Plan would be of little use, and it would be more useful to agree on work schedules and set out responsibilities in a number of brief documents to be pasted on the wall of the administrator's office.

Point 3:

The issue of the diesel pump cropped up regularly, as it often broke down. It was often very difficult to obtain support from Magalies Water. The pump was finally serviced only after it broke down completely two months later.

Points 4 and 5:

The contractor was extremely unreliable, and in my opinion can be blamed for many of the problems that occurred in Ga-Rasai. He started work late and missed all of his deadlines. The consequences of this are discussed in Chapter 1.

Among other problems the computer room was not completed before the computer was delivered. This resulted in serious concerns about its security. After much discussion it was kept in one of the few electrified houses in the village. However this was unsatisfactory for a number of reasons and resulted in several arguments which endangered the initial provision of prepayment tokens.

Points 6, 7 and 8

This was a very bland summary of a serious argument that broke out regarding R. D. Tlale's allocation of employment. R. D. Tlale was accused by John Madalane of not informing him when cement was delivered and needed to be unloaded. Tlale, apparently, had favoured his own friends and family. Tlale was also accused of taking an important decision without seeking the consensus of the other committee members. The meeting soon dissolved into shouts and threats. The divisions between the PSC and the Water Committee were ignored as the Madalane faction and the Tlale faction drew together in opposition to each other.

At one point everyone ran out of the room to continue the argument outside and a fistfight nearly broke out. Eventually the committee members decided to discuss the issue after the meeting. As it was clear that my intervention would not be welcome, and that it would be difficult to return to mundane matters, the meeting was closed with a prayer and I departed.

Appendix 2: Kuper's 'Case of the Pumpers'

From Adam Kuper's "The Kgalagari Lekgota" (1971:94-97)

The Case of the Pumpers

This ... issue provoked factional activity of unusual intensity. The 'Case of the Pumpers' also arose in Kuli village, where there are three factions, which have existed for the past fifteen to twenty years. There are two factions within the ruling Pebana sub-clan, one led by the headman, the other by one of his younger half-brothers. Mabote. The minority sub-clan, the Silebe, forms the basis of a third faction. There is a tendency towards the polarisation of two factions on particular political issues. The third faction (Mabote's or the Silebe) sides with one group or the other, and their choice of sides usually determines the outcome of the conflict, though the influential neutral citizens also carry weight in such a situation.

The Pumper's Case focussed on the government borehole in Kuli, for which the villagers are responsible. They should appoint and pay the 'pumper' who operates it, but here, as in many Kgalagari villages, the operation of the borehole has become a source of recurrent political tension.

The first pumper was the headman's son. He was dismissed in the late 'fifties by the District Commissioner, as a result of complaints form members of Mabote's faction. The incident occurred during a peak of interfactional tension. The *lekgota* appointed as his successor a man named Morimomong, who was a counsellor and a prominent member of Mabote's faction. In 1963 Morimomong left the village. He wrote a letter to the *lekgota* saying that his son, Sekoma, had succeeded him as pumper and should be paid his wages. The *lekgota* declined to consider the situation until Morimomong appeared before it in person. In 1964 Morimomong returned to Kuli, and Sekoma, who had worked unpaid all this time, precipitated a crisis by going on strike and hiding the crank with which the engine of the borehole was started.

The *lekgota* met quickly to discuss the crisis. The debate centred around two questions - by what right Sekoma had been made pumper, and should a new pumper be appointed? The headman pushed these questions aside and forced a decision on who should *now* become pumper. He said:

> 'The District Commissioner wants us to find another man for the engine. [This, I believe, was a piece of pure invention.] Sekoma is like Morimomong and deserts his post. I tell you, Pebana, you must look for a new pumper. I want a new pumper. I have no news and no case.'

Each of the two Pebana factions put forward a candidate for the post - Merahe, the headman's candidate, and Sekoma, Mabote's candidate. The Silebe were uncommitted and the *lekgota*

waited to see whom they would support. A Silebe counsellor, a man who was often the Silebe spokesman in the *lekgota*, rose and called on the *lekgota*-men to express their opinions. They should not leave the decision to the counsellors. The headman's son tried to force the issue by suggesting a show of hands - a measure frequently suggested at times of apparent deadlock, but seldom, if ever, resorted to. At length the Silebe counsellor spoke again. He would support Mehare's candidature, since a pumper should live near the borehole. This argument was unconvincing, for both candidates lived within a few hundred yards of the borehole. The Silebe were being tactful, but they had thrown their lot in with the headman on this issue.

The headman now spoke again. Mabote and his men had acted wrongly by appointing a pumper unilaterally. Mabote was absent today: he had sent word he was sick, but he said 'He is not sick. He is just against me.'.

Morimomong, one of the protagonists, then spoke:

> 'I want to speak. It is not a strong word, so do not be afraid. I ask the *lekgota* not to be angry. These men [the citizens in the council] are afraid to say yes. When the headman asks whether we agree, we men in the *lekgota* do not reflect that if we say yes we will affect years of another man's life. We want the headman to appoint and we will agree. Do not point to one man and say you are the one who said yes.'

The discussion then moved on to the details of Merahe's salary, etc. and it appeared that the consensus had been achieved. A counsellor said, 'Headman, we have chosen Merahe'. Another man said, 'We are all sons of Ramoswane [the headman], we all know one another', in an attempt to stifle further discord. But there were echoes of Morimomong's speech. One man said, 'I am speaking because the men in *lekgota* will say they were speaking and I just kept quiet. When tomorrow, something goes wrong with the engine, some men will say, *I* did not choose Merahe'.

Merahe worked as a pumper for several months and then he went on strike as Sekoma had done, and threatened to tell the District Commissioner, whose visit was imminent that he had not been paid his wages. The *lekgota* met and soon recognised (as an influential independent citizen remarked) that Merahe had not been paid because Sekoma's supporters were not reconciled to his appointment, and were withholding their contributions to his salary. The dismissal of Sekoma was debated once more. Despite the fact that Mabote was present and argued Sekoma's case himself, it was soon clear that the majority would not accept Sekoma's claim. Mabote was vigorously criticised.

The debate was cut short by the arrival of the District Commissioner. After the District Commissioner had completed his business with the *lekgota*, the headman asked him to hear 'the case of the pumper'. But the only issue the headman put to the District Commissioner was Merahe's claim to the payment of his wages. The District Commissioner said that of course Merahe should be paid, and he instructed the court-scribe to see that anyone who failed to contribute towards Merahe's wages be banned from using the borehole.

This did not provide a permanent solution. In 1967 this and later resolutions had come to nothing. Due to the factional dispute, the borehole - after an anarchic period when a number of men operated it for the benefit of their own families - had become derelict. Even in the Kalahari, blood is thicker than water.

The question of the pumper had been a factional issue for years before the dispute I have described blew up, and factional activity dominated the *lekgota* debates. The headman's partisanship was particularly important - he forced the *lekgota* to make a rapid choice between the two candidates by invoking the name of the District Commissioner and he later brought in the District Commissioner in person to clinch his victory. He was in a position to take these steps only because he had the support of the Silebe and some neutrals in addition to the members of his own faction. He might not have risked his final move, despite this support, but for a threat from Merahe to appeal to the District Commissioner directly. This might have reflected on the headman's authority.

Despite the conflicts and the headman's authoritarian tactics, there was a clear concern for public agreement by the citizens in the *lekgota.* This emerged particularly in the speeches of Morimomong and the man who followed him, and indirectly, in the remark of the man who urged agreement on the grounds that 'We are all sons of the headman. We know one another'. (This is an argument based on the existence of multiplex relations!) What also emerged was the general reluctance to take responsibility for contentious decisions.

The opposition tactics deserve notice. Aside from their participation in some debates they influenced events by absenteeism. If one is absent one cannot be pressurised to concur in a decision, and one cannot commit oneself to its implementation. Mabote's absence thus left the way open for non-co-operation in the implementation of the decision - i.e. for the non-payment of Merahe's wages.

Finally, the role of neutrals and 'outsiders' should be mentioned. The District Commissioner was used to provide a sanction for the majority decision; and within the *lekgota* uncommitted

groups and individuals brought delicate issues into the open, and significantly influenced the outcome by their choice of sides. Though detached from the factional confrontation, these men determined the immediate result.

...

The Kgalagari accept the value of consensus, and are quite explicit about the importance of persuading citizens not only to accept by publicly to identify themselves with a decision of the *lekgota.* As they frequently say, they are reluctant to force *(gopukeleja)* their fellows. In any case, everyone is well aware that in most matters of village policy the District Commissioner or police will not coerce dissidents. As Bailey has remarked, with similarly structured councils in other places in mind, 'Everyone knows that if the decision is not the result of an agreed compromise, then it cannot be implemented.' (Bailey, 1965: 8). The 'Case of the Pumpers' illustrates the fragility of a decision by majority, even when that decision is backed by the authority of the District Commissioner.

The main business of the *lekgota* is to reach, by consensus if possible, the decisions which will govern many of the public affairs of the village. The greatest danger facing the *lekgota* is that as a popular political institution operating within a small and closely-knit community it may provoke or exacerbate social conflicts, leading at last to the complete breakdown of village government. However, there exist various mechanisms which tend to dampen down conflict within the *lekgota.*

...

Other mechanisms tending to dampen down conflict are the discouragement of personal attacks in speeches; the use of the tactic of absenteeism, which allows tempers to cool and avoids direct confrontation in tense situations; and the use of scape-goats (always outsiders and often schoolteachers) to carry the blame for extreme conflicts. And finally shared interests, particularly vis-à-vis outside bodies, may be invoked. It is possibly unnecessary to add that these methods of reducing conflict are occasionally inadequate, and that the techniques the Kgalagari have refined are at times insufficient to ensure that decisions can be reached or enforced, particularly on matters of internal administration.

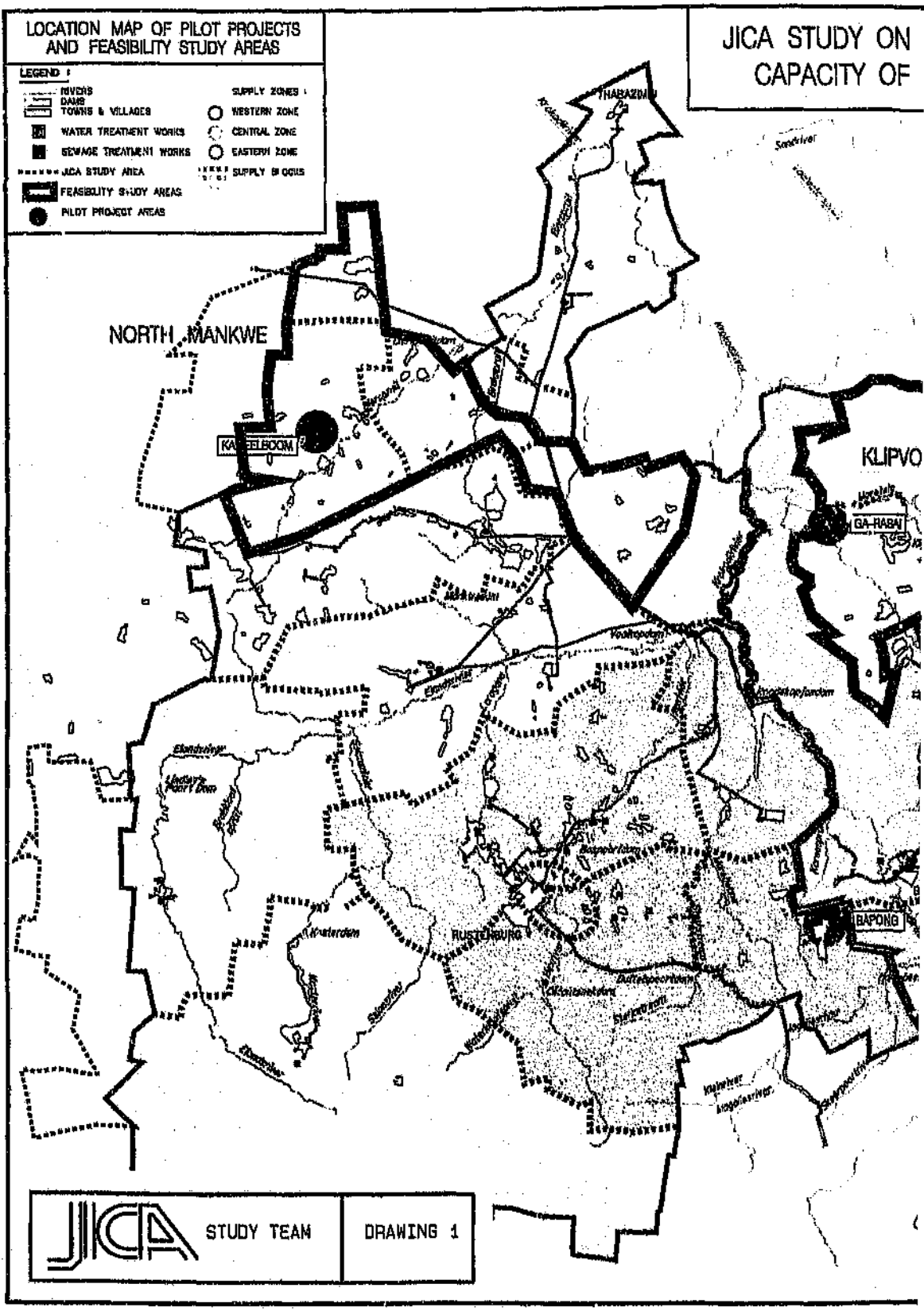
Appendix 3: Critical path for the Ga-Rasai pilot project

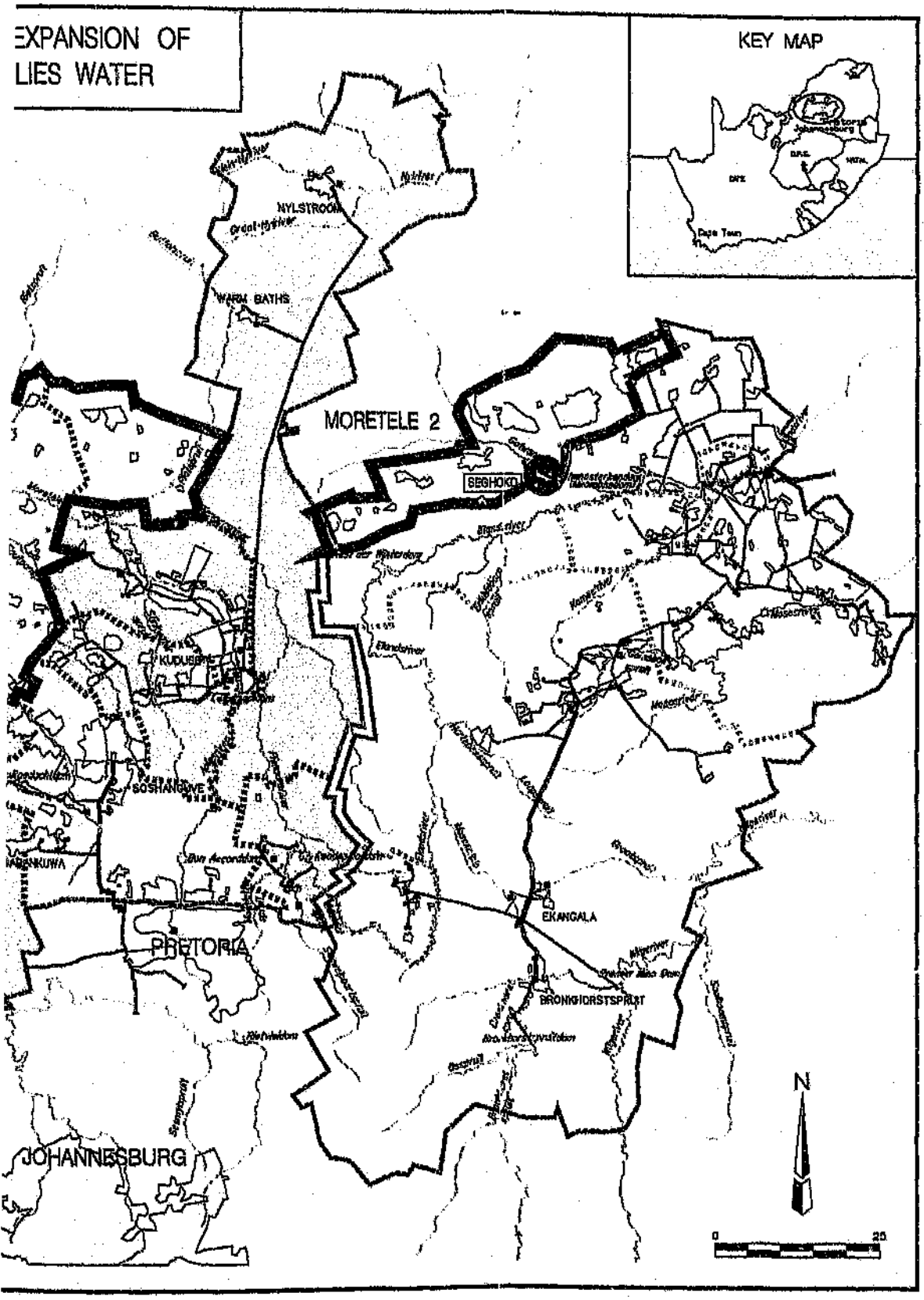
Table B.3.5-2 Pilot Project Programme : April - November 1997, Ga Rasai

CODE	TASK DESCRIPTION	APL	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	ENG TEAM	INSTIT TEAM	MAJOR OUTPUT
1.0	PROVISION OF WATER SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE											Implementation of Project
1.1	Preparation of technical and institutional briefing document, with outline LPSC terms of reference									Resp	Resp	
1.2	Technical briefings for LPSC									Asst	Resp	
1.3	Preparation of tender documents									Resp		
1.4	Study Team review of tender documents with LPSC. Must include O&M training, local employment									Resp	Asst	
1.5	Call for tenders									Resp		
1.6	Study Team appraisal of tenders, and discussion with LPSC									Resp	Asst	
1.7	Contract award									Resp		
1.8	Construction and construction supervision									Resp		
1.9	Testing of works									Resp		
1.10	Training of O&M staff by contractor									Resp	Asst	
1.11	Commission facilities									Resp		
2.0	LPSC EMPOWERMENT AND AWARENESS BUILDING											Capable and responsible LPSC
2.1	Discussion of technical and institutional briefing document (see 1.1)									Asst	Resp	
2.2	Finalisation of LPSC structures according to agreed technical solutions										Resp	
2.3	Awareness building workshops with LSCs and communities (water supply, water management, cost recovery)									Asst	Resp	
3.0	CAPACITY BUILDING AND CONFIRMATION OF INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGES											Capacity building plan and programme
3.1	Formulation of LPSC, communication strategy, allocation of roles and responsibilities, and activation										Resp	
3.2	Formulation of local government/LPSC, capacity building programme, roles and responsibilities, activation										Resp	
3.3	Formulation of institutional linkages plan (with DC, MW, Area Forums), roles and responsibilities, activation										Resp	
4.0	PLANNING FOR WATER MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE SYSTEMS											Management and O&M plans and processes
4.1	LPSC terms of reference for water management plan (including tariff setting, cost recovery and upgrading). TOR to include attention to systems, resources, roles, capacity and										Resp	
4.2	Selection and operationalisation of Study Team/LPSC task team to develop water management plan										Resp	
4.3	LPSC terms of reference for O&M plan. TOR to include systems, resources, roles, capacity and training needs.									Asst	Resp	
4.4	Selection and operationalisation of Study Team/LPSC task team to develop O&M plan										Resp	
4.5	Preparation of O&M manual by contractors									Resp	Asst	
4.6	Collection of information on best practice regarding cost recovery, billing, regulation of unauthorised connections									Asst	Resp	
4.7	Assistance to water management task team on tariff setting procedures and financial management									Asst	Resp	
4.8	Assistance to water management task team on organisational development and organisational procedure										Resp	
5.0	STRATEGIC RESEARCH											Strategic management information
5.1	Additional community-based research as needed (eg. influence of pilot project activities on willingness to pay)										Resp	
6.0	MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL TRAINING											Training and skills transfer
6.1	Management and administrative training needs determined by water management task team										Resp	
6.2	Technical training needs determined by O&M task team									Asst	Resp	
6.3	Development of TOR for management administrative training										Resp	
6.4	Development of TOR for O&M training									Asst	Resp	
6.5	Identify and recruit management administrative training providers (if Study Team skills are inadequate)										Resp	
6.6	Identify and recruit O&M training providers (if Study Team skills and contractor programmes are inadequate)									Asst	Resp	
6.7	Identify trainees (including counterparts) and commence training (management and administration)										Resp	
6.8	Identify trainees (including counterparts) and commence training (O&M)										Resp	
7.0	OPERATIONALISE INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS											Management structures and systems
7.1	Obtain community mandate and install water management										Resp	
7.2	Obtain community mandate and install O&M plan										Resp	
7.3	Confirm linkages and responsibilities with DC, MW, DWAF Provincial Office, Area Planning Forums										Resp	
7.4	Agree and implement monitoring process									Asst	Resp	
8.0	SHARING BEST PRACTICE											Wider sharing of best practice
8.1	First best practice workshop and pilot project report-back (coincides with PEG meeting)									Asst	Resp	
8.2	Second best practice workshop and pilot project report back (coincides with PEG meeting)									Asst	Resp	

Appendix 4: Area map

Showing the position of Ga-Rasai and the other pilot projects within Magalies Water's supply area, and relative to nearby major urban centres.


LOCATION MAP OF PILOT PROJECTS AND FEASIBILITY STUDY AREAS
LEGEND :
RIVERS
DAMS
TOWNS & VILLAGES
WATER TREATMENT WORKS
SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS
JICA STUDY AREA
FEASIBILITY STUDY AREAS
PILOT PROJECT AREAS
SUPPLY ZONES :
WESTERN ZONE
CENTRAL ZONE
EASTERN ZONE
SUPPLY BOOSTERS
JICA STUDY ON CAPACITY OF
NORTH MANKWE
KATLEHONG
THABAZIMBI
KLIPVO
GA-RANKUWA
BAPONG
RUSTENBURG
JICA
STUDY TEAM
DRAWING 1


EXPANSION OF
LIES WATER
KEY MAP
NYLSTROOM
WARM BATHS
MORETELE 2
SEGHOKO
KUDUSRUS
SOSHANGUVE
MABOPANE
PRETORIA
EKANGALA
BRONKHORSTSPRUIT
JOHANNESBURG
Cape Town
N
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Author: Burke, Edward.
Name of thesis: Meetings, minutes and the limits of participation in a rural water project.

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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