

THE BNF/BMD/BPP UMBRELLA WILL ENDURE ON THIS EXQUISITE JOURNEY

A fortnight ago, delegates of the Botswana Movement for Democracy congregated to consider policy proposals on how to build a model nation that is the envy of the world, and how to carve a path for generations to come, one whose distances and gorges are worth travelling. Simultaneously, the younger torchbearers gathered to propose and elect the few whose mandate is to lead them, the Youth Wing of this marvellous movement.

If we have to seek joy in what is possible, then we find it in the conduct and determination of these resilient cadres who braved proceedings throughout Saturday, right into the deep night and day-break into Sunday.

Many of the young foot soldiers of our movement, and of our umbrella formation partners - the Botswana National Front and the Botswana People's Party – should celebrate who they are and the colour of their work. They have offered this nation a true alternative, an alternative Government, a genuine choice that we do not have to impose on anyone, but one that gives future generations something to be grateful about.

The recent weeks marked an unhappy spell for the coalition of parties comprising of the Botswana Movement for Democracy, the Botswana National Front and the Botswana People's Party. This umbrella formation of progressive voices, continues to be lynched by sceptics within and outside media circles. The new fodder for the cynicism is the recent expulsion, and the resignation, of prominent figures of the Botswana National Front.

We could dwell on these internal party affairs and believe that the foundations that build our alternative Government are cracking at the seams or we can stand tall and accept that every great journey will have casualties. We can crumble at what the cynics and sceptics say about us, or we can develop the thick body skin that understands that everyone that hopes to lead, guide and serve must take all the inconveniences of doing and standing for the right things. We must take the blows, blow by blow, with endurance and faith.

The smallest hint that someone, or a few people in our movement, the BMD, might be sympathetic to the idea of a possible coalition with the ruling party is the new trouble magnet. It is an idea whose effect acts to deepen suspicions that our movement's leaders are not genuinely interested in bringing about true fundamental change that uplifts the lives of our people. However, it is an idea that is being forcefully rejected and pushed back by almost everyone in our Movement. And certainly, it is generally believed in BMD circles, that any coalition with the ruling party would temper with the core of our existence, a form of death knell.

We can choose to punish and blame our own for their freedom of thought and for believing in options that we ourselves believe are deeply flawed or we can instead accept that our journey is a colourful one that embraces diversity. Our embrace of diversify does not mean that we are willing to compromise with a ring of ruling elites who possess little regard for the sanctity of the human life and who continue to squander the right for ordinary citizens to achieve their highest potential.

The BMD is also on the receiving end of constant bombardment, for being a constellation of over-ambitious, spoilt politicians whose only reason for existence is frustration and bitterness. As the tale goes, we craved for higher positions while with the ruling party and left when we were denied recognition. These high positions, supposedly, are what would make the world go round for us and what constitutes our true motive for doing the things we do. We learn from the ruling elite that, ultimately, we would fall apart, turn into ashes, and go into history as examples of how a mirage looks like.

We can cry all-day in the name of abuse and fowl-language used against us, or we can rise like men and women with a purpose - men and women who understand that it is normal for people of substance to be labelled. History will be the judge.

Our movement is not a perfect institution, nor are our plans perfect; neither are we masters of the art of life. But certainly, among us, among our grouping of leaders, within our umbrella formation, we have among us some of the best people who possess the sound character and capacity to lead our nation to much greater heights than the current ruling party is able to – and this is for certain.

We have foot soldiers that continually seek the face of perfection; they are constantly working on perfecting our plans for our people. This is our commitment, and we must be courageous in how we uphold our commitment. And we should allow others to fault us if they wish to – we must accept the criticism, embrace the criticism, and work towards perfecting our plans and who we are. This is a life worth living.

We also learn all the time that our coalition partner, the BNF, is innately unstable and ungovernable. We hear it is a party with an appetite to destroy itself and ruin its prospects for electoral success whenever victory comes within reach. We are finding out that, on the contrary, our communing

with the BNF, through its leaders and its people, that this BNF is a community of citizens that truly cares about this nation, people who are constantly marinating over ideas on how to build a significantly better Botswana. The deep pool of dedicated and capable leaders within the BNF augurs well for what is to be a new Botswana in years to come, a nation that will stand tall as an exemplar among the community of nations.

Earlier in the year, the Botswana Congress Party, another of Botswana major political parties, announced its intention to operate outside the confines of the new Umbrella formation, a project still being pursued by the BMD/BNF/BPP coalition. BCP's withdrawal provoked spirited debate in public and private fora. In many ways this has strained relations between the BCP and the BMD/BNF/BPP coalition. This turn of events has opened new wounds and contaminated the political atmosphere of our nation's politics. On occasion, the language that has come into circulation in the ranks of the BCP and in the ranks of our own Umbrella, wears unattractive and inappropriate garment.

We appeal to our beautiful people, our determined cadres and our diligent activists. Please, friends, we must carry ourselves like true victors. We must carry ourselves like children who understand that we have already won, and await the day to collect the prize of serving our people. We must treat everyone with respect no matter how much they differ with us; we must honour all citizens of this nation as we would our own family. Our qualm is not with the BCP or with its people; our qualm is with the careless and ruthless management style of the ruling elite who are squandering the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of many ordinary people of our country.

We must allow room for a mature and serene debate (internal and public) even among Umbrella partners or within the ambit of other non-ruling parties. Our brand of democracy should not only embrace debate when it favours us, but we must be prepared to listen to alternative views. We can achieve this without insulting or labelling others or taking away from the efforts of others or our own. Indeed, if we cultivated this culture, our coalition of parties (BNF/BMD/BPP), labour and the public will endure, and withstand the test of time. We should not feel violated, for instance, if some in the BNF challenge our movement's thinking on a particular matter, or when the BPP expresses reservation about a BMD policy position or if the labour movement is unhappy about something that one of partners did. If we exercise this brand of mature democracy, all the weapons used against our coalition will crumble; and sure, all those weapons used against us shall not prosper. This is our faith.

We must understand that our own actions have planted a sense of disappointment among many citizens of our country. Our citizens are uncomfortable with any sign that all we are good at is fighting among ourselves; they question our authentic quest to serve and wonder if our interest is simply with the lure of raw political power and mischievous intentions to loot the national coffers. They have the right to ask these questions and to wonder if indeed we are serious. We need therefore to continually demonstrate our seriousness, and our sense of preparedness to make Botswana a sterling example of what is possible in the business of improving people's lives.

Indeed we are prepared, but it is not enough to be prepared, we all also need to show our preparedness. We need to tell our people that we offer them a choice: they must decide if they are happy with the current education system, a system, yes, that creates educated officer employees of large bureaucracies; or they can embrace a new education system that inculcates a technical, practical, character-building culture of excellence, a culture of citizens who itch to create, invent and build manufacturing plants, take initiative and offer services and create jobs for others.

Our people must decide if they are happy with the current management of the economy based on the "indoda-iyas'bonela" principle, where those left behind by the economic mainstream are assumed to be un-enterprising; where the only thing managed jealously are diamonds; where business success is measured by the ability to win tenders or go into deals with multi-nationals or by access to the highest offices on the land; where the new economic plans are based on "diversifying the economy" – or, our people can embrace a new, common-sense, pragmatist economic thinking based not only on "diversifying the economy" but on fortifying, broadening participation in, growing, re-vitalizing non-traditional sectors in which we have a good chance of success, and modernising our economy.

To achieve this, we will introduce a raft of initiatives one of which is to build an effective and well-funded research and development programme – in this way we will curtail the pouring of money into unproductive businesses and significantly fund efforts towards perfecting and commercializing indigenous food recipes (jams, butters, cheese, medicines starches, processed meats, leather products), indigenous drink recipes (morula drinks, yoghurts etc.) and indigenous technologies (software development, solar appliances etc.).

We will also assist existing successful parastatals become multi-national entities. We will emphasise the creation of wealth. We will look to our education system to support more sustainable small businesses that are premised on skills and sustainable opportunity – plumbers, refrigeration technicians, carpenters and welders all of which are currently dominated by foreign skills.

We will give our people a choice to stick with the current Government whose bureaucracy is centralized in the capital city and micro-managed from the Office of the President, a system in which our citizens in the forgotten places have to wait months upon years for services (applications for land, building of schools, agricultural extension services) they should receive within a day – or, our people can, with the power of their vote, choose an efficient, more de-centralised Government that works through empowered councils (with directly elected mayors), empowered (directly elected) regional governors and inspired, incentivised public servants whose supervisors are selected on merit.

We offer our country a choice to continue with their provocative and all-interfering foreign policy that irks independent nations or our people could decide to bring to life a calmer more subtle manner of engaging our allies and wayward countries, in a way that persistently improves the image of our country and opens economic doors for our businessmen and businesswomen. We offer our people more than can be carried in one statement.

Of course, the ruling elite will continue to deny that we offer our people this stark choice – they will even deny our party has any policies; they will seek to hide what we offer our people. Instead of study our plans and confess they need to improve on their own, they will continue to label our movement's leaders and our movement as a mirage. This will not change the responsibility we carry, the responsibility to offer our nation hope, a chance for our country to be a better home for all its people. We must take all the blows, blow for blow, without developing any sense of fatigue or

despair, neither should we in anyway feel violated – our people need us to stay the full course; we do it, not for ourselves, but for our people, for generations that will come after us.

A matter raised over and over again is the charge by the ruling elite that we will fight among ourselves for various positions including that of President of the coalition, and for the right to run as constituency members of parliament. Our coalition is fortunate to have a depth of leaders who understand that position, performed to perfection, brings about the burden of responsibility; it is not an occasion to amass material benefit. Our coalition has enough competent people who are willing to defer to others, some who are not even intending on running for political office within the coalition structures and some who are not planning to run for parliament despite their capabilities. Our coalition has people who understand that service to a nation comes in many forms, and is not in any way tied to positions or political office.

In the third quarter of last year, I issued a statement in which I expressed reservation about our conduct in relation to our collective pursuit of the Umbrella project. Some within our party and the Umbrella collective, in good faith, and understandably so, felt that my actions had contravened the position of our Party and of our leadership - and that I deserved to be harshly counselled for what was considered a misbehaviour. Some but not all in the media brandished my name, as a paragon of rebellion - the man who “dismissed” the Umbrella. Many capable and eloquent commentators, on radio and print, took turns to take a dig at what I had stood for. The ruling elite celebrated what they believed reflected an erupting fissure between the leader of our party and I. The silence with which I treated these turn of events was, in some circles, interpreted as a form of silencing by the party.

It is a delight that a new season has dawned, and I stand by the words of my statement to this day. It is news that I ever did “dismiss” the umbrella project. An expression of reservation and a dismissal are not the same thing.

Our Kgale Congress had accorded our party leadership a mandate to explore working with other parties, in the form of an Umbrella, with a view to returning with feedback on how far we had been able to go, on what we thought would genuinely be possible and on what decisions had to be made. There never was a restriction of definition that an Umbrella would exist only if every major political party was party to the coalition. So if anyone had favoured a slower, one-at-a-time negotiations with others, such as I did, then this would, in any case, be well within the confines of our resolutions.

The advice carried in the statement pleaded for a slower approach based also on the idea that as a party we earn more confidence of our partner parties if we came to the negotiating table with more organizational clout, comprising of approved policies and a vibrant branch network system. Indeed our policy assembly of May 2012 has offered our party this clout. We needed to ensure that we had the capacity to manage a coalition of many major political parties; there is no doubt now, that our current Umbrella is ideally capacitated to manage its many challenges.

The statement had been intended as a statement of advice, not rebuke or imposition; it was an act performed in a spirit of sharing with others. Of course such advice is often given internally. In exceptional circumstances, and for the sake of sharing, it becomes necessary to escalate and provide “public advice” to show the public that our party and its leaders are aware that the choices we face are not black and white, and that our party system is robust enough to guide the party towards the

right paths. In the statement, it was clearly outlined that we would all support the party in whatever route it decides. We are servants, and we will serve our party and the nation of Botswana. We need to embrace that the independence of thought can be quite compatible with sub-subservience to our party and the national interest.

It is essential that all our people understand this matter for what it was or it is, so that we have our feet strongly routed to the ground. I have a responsibility to serve honestly and exercise fair judgement in the role to which our Movement elected me – I have done my best to do so, and if anyone should loathe me they should do so on the basis that I have failed to act honestly and I have exercised bad judgement. If our Movement or our coalition of partners believe I have transgressed these principles (honesty and fair judgement), then they will have a duty to the people of Botswana to have me relieved from such immense and delicate responsibility.

Those who sought and still seek to divide our people and our leaders will fail, for our victory is certain. We will achieve much more than establish an admiring and enduring working relationship with the tenacious Botswana People’s Party and the resilient Botswana National Front. We will carve a meaningful stake for workers, and more importantly, we will unite more intimately, the people of Botswana. Our victory is not based on winning elections, it is drawn from offering our nation a gift, a gift of an alternative leadership, a chance to achieve new heights in the welfare of all our people. Our coalition, the Umbrella, offers the people of Botswana this alternative.

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I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not

fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord". Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., 3 April 1968

Confessions part IV

I forgot to mention that when in Gaborone last week, a wonderful Mrs Gaboutlwele came running after me at the end of church service. She wielded a decorated bag, which she handed to me as a present, apparently, for something I "had done for the choir". I am not sure what it is I have done or, perhaps, I am not willing to say what it is I have done, if at all. Anyhow, she handed me a bag containing some white, plush towels. I was moved by this gesture. I was due to travel within an hour, so I thought mhmhm this is something that my sister would be happy to have. Without checking exactly how the towels looked like, I gave her (my sister) the towels to keep, reporting to her that they were handed by to me by the church choir. As I was leaving, she came to me, indicating that she couldn't keep the towels; apparently, my name is imprinted on all of them...

Fare-thee-well my Johannesburg friends

Johannesburg is a place of many of reputations, one of them, I suppose, explains the relatively sizeable security personnel in the complex where I have been staying (the security is for everyone in the complex not just one person). I know all of them, and it is fair to say I count them among friends, and I hope they do count me too. George is the inspired pastor, rarely missing an opportunity to share a biblical verse, and he does so with the gusto of someone who longs to dance at the pulpit. He doesn't always get the facts right though, but I don't mention it to him, no. Only once in a while would I find a way of asking him to read a chapter again, without suggesting blemishes in his accuracy. Then there is Eric, the gentleman. He is measured in his tone and perspective. It is politics and sports that interest him. Rarely is he in a hurry to make conclusions on the basis of what the papers say...I will tell you about the others one day. Anyway, yesterday I knocked off quite late in the night and stopped by them – about five of them were on duty. I told them I felt immensely privileged to be associated with them, and that I could never understand more than they do how it is like to protect others, against monsters, even though those they protect may not appreciate or acknowledge this. Even so, I said them, I am grateful that while I sleep in the night, while I build mathematical models in the night, while I read, while I scribble on many issues, while I marinate about the future, while I pray, while I converse with family on the phone, while I take stock of the lives passed yet still so luminous, "it is you that make it possible. For this, I could not find the monies to adequately compensate you, but with these small tokens (one each for all of them including those who where not on duty, about nine of them), I extend my hand of friendship and appreciation to you. I do so not as a result of my generosity of heart, but as an outcome of the compelling power of the lives you live, and how you are able to give so much to others without expecting much recognition."

"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "press on" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race" Calvin Coolidge quotes (American 30th President of the United States, 1872-1933

"Look at yourselves. Some of you teenagers, students. How do you think I feel and I belong to a generation ahead of you - how do you think I feel to have to tell you, 'We, my generation, sat around

like a knot on a wall while the whole world was fighting for its human rights - and you've got to be born into a society where you still have that same fight.' What did we do, who preceded you? I'll tell you what we did. Nothing. And don't you make the same mistake we made...."

Malcom X.

SPECIAL TRANSCRIPT - THE BMD AND COALITION POLITICS: AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW.

October 5, 2011 at 12:22pm

A SPECIAL TRANSCRIPT - THE BMD AND COALITION POLITICS: AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

(A personal opinion)

The coalition talks among Botswana's major opposition parties, the Botswana Movement For Democracy, the Botswana People's Party, the Botswana National Front and the Botswana Congress Party, form an eventful chapter in our nation's unfolding political narrative. In the popular urban culture, the side of the story that is often told is that of an opportune moment for the merging of these parties or their working as a single unit to oust the fatigued ruling Botswana Democratic Party.

According to the narrative, there is no better time than now for the alternative parties to capture the 2014 vote into one umbrella vote. This view is apparently informed by the statistics of the past, suggesting that, had Botswana's alternative political parties worked as a unit, they should have been able to wrestle power from the BDP or at the least provide a viable voting block within parliament.

It appears that the general assumption is that the ruling party, the BDP, is unhappy with the prospect of a successful outcome to the "coalition talks", although this might prove to be a costly assumption. All the same, the arising impression is that the ruling party is awed by the concept of the Umbrella. Consequently, the ruling party's propaganda machinery seems calibrated to portray the Umbrella as the work of naïve politicians, excited by the prospect of state power and possessing little to offer by way of ideas or disposition to transport our nation to higher achievement.

By extension, those who are part of the Umbrella collective for a new Botswana find it difficult to express criticism of the coalition concept, at least in its current format or complexion (of three or four equal partners under an umbrella), lest they are misunderstood to be part of the cynical propaganda.

Yet one of the greatest achievements of our political process since the advent of the Orange revolution, or the formation of the BMD, is the idea that no one is too small or too insignificant to extol views that are not in sync with those of their leaders; and that everyone has the right to express their views, no matter their rank, and still be confident that they would not be persecuted for holding or conveying those views.

It is in this spirit that it is now necessary to express the views of those whom, in good faith, wish our party leaders find it within them to consider alternatives to the current coalition umbrella concept. A prevailing perspective among our members, especially in the rural areas, is that the Botswana Movement for Democracy is too young a baby to be already embarking on marriage negotiations – marriage negotiations that entail more than one wife or husband for that matter.

According to these members, a good groom or bride must have a better sense of self-knowledge. The BMD is still on an upswing, establishing new branches, wards and cells everyday. These new members deserve an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the vision of our party, and its aspirations to uplift the lives of our citizens. They are learning about each other, holding each other's hands, guiding each other and praying with each other. These are the type of journeys that take time. How do we confidently offer to others what we might not be in possession of? How do we take from others what we might not be in need of?

Our members are saying, we ought to allow ourselves to grow and fully develop into the type of promise that everyone can see from a distance. The citizens of this country deserve the opportunity to look at us and say "we don't like the shape of your legs, but we admire the industry of your hand and the ideas that your mind generates".

But we would be expecting too much from our nation if we thought this is how they should perceive us so early our development.

And if we marry ourselves to the current format of the proposed Umbrella, we create another of what could be an unending legend, "we wonder how that kid would have turned out in the end".

When two or more organizations merge, it is really the two or more cultures that merge. The merging of cultures, throughout all of history, is a process that takes time – years, not months, and not weeks. If we must merge with others, we must do so with this understanding, appreciating that no matter how badly we may seek to cohabit with others, we succeed only when we pick and choose the right partners, one at a time. It is worth repeating: one partner at a time. This seems like the long way to do it, but nothing beats old-fashioned patience and thoroughness. Time and experience are always the best teachers.

Three or more cultures under one Umbrella (as is envisaged in the coalition) is a major leap in approach for any one political party. The contestation of ideas and personalities are normal, and can be overcome with time and fair disposition. But this takes time, years, and self-application. Success in managing the ensuing challenges means accepting the Umbrella business as the core business of the individual parties. This is fine if this is the choice that our political parties wish to wilfully make.

When streams of admirers joined our Movement, the BMD, they did so believing that the core business of their party is pursuing the vision of the very party they were joining and mobilizing our citizens around these aspirations. We need to be careful not to breach the faith and trust our members bestowed on us when we were elected to positions of responsibility. We need to pursue the idea of working with others or merging with others in a way that does not unduly deflect us from our core responsibilities as a party.

It is a fact that the three or four cultures stacked into the ongoing Umbrella concept will create a slow-moving animal once elected to state-power. Decisions on policy and appointments of key personnel will come-by after long (albeit healthy) debates. It is MELS and the ruling party that will enjoy a comparative niche when it comes to making swift decisions, and probably acting on them. The nation of Botswana expects and deserves a new Government that is configured in a way that will deliver a far swifter and crisper decision-making machinery than the current envisaged Umbrella format could. A coalition must have a leading partner, for certain. A coalition of more than two equal partners, without a leading partner, is not practical.

An arrangement in which a coalition has no leading partner creates acute uncertainty, in the eyes of the voter. The ordinary citizen is not sure exactly what to expect from a coalition once in Government. A single policy document is no cure for this condition. The ordinary voter seeks clarity, simplicity, tangibility and sincere prospect for positive change. They wish to be clear in their minds as to who really are the people in charge? Which set of policies are really going to be dominant? Is this formation sustainable, seeing that sustaining cohesion in any single party is hard work on its own? Our thirst for a truly democratic dispensation does not mean we must strip our nation from

the opportunity to receive effective and decisive leadership. Nor do local communities wish to be told anymore, by some elite grouping anywhere, that they should be represented by an individual based only on his/her party affiliation.

But it is only our nation's voters that are best placed to decide who should lead any form of coalition Government. The idea that the ruling party will only fall if all major opposition parties formed a tripartite coalition is a man-made standard or idea. It is a fallacy. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy that only serves to cripple the psyche of the very people who are promoting it.

By creating this man-made standard, we are awarding the ruling party a mighty image that they do not deserve. Yet the current Government will fall, not as a result of anyone's brilliance or courage, but will implode on their own. They will crumble on the weight of their own injustice, their own wayward habits and tastes, their own disregard for the sanctity of the human life, their own fatigue to serve, their own forbea for new and worthwhile ideas, their own authoritarianism, their own lack of faith in the potential of ordinary citizens and their own penchant for irresponsibility.

Our responsibility is not to dwell on bringing the ruling party down - for they have already done that on their own - our responsibility is to ensure that we prepare diligently, sincerely and competently for governing this country when the moment arrives. No one knows when this moment will come - it could be in 2014, it might be in 2019 and it could even be next year. What we should not do is to allow impatience to creep into our hearts. This would take away the sincerity of our promise to serve this country in an uplifting way.

We should have enough faith, as much faith as many citizens of country now have, that there is a new hope in the horizon - here and now. Let no one say to us that our hope depends only on the outcome of these talks or those talks. Let no one suggest that therefore if talks don't go according

to what some may have envisaged, then there is no hope. Our hope is here - we are that hope - all of us - all of us that care about our nation, in the BMD, BNF, BCP, MELS, the Unions, non-aligned citizens and yes some who identify with any other political party in Botswana. Our responsibility is simply to prepare, prepare and prepare. We need to keep preparing so that we truly become that hope that our citizens say we represent.

We must never underestimate the citizens of this nation. They have the power to create a coalition for us, a true coalition inspired by natural admiration for one another. They will hand to one party, and only one party, a leading role. This party may not necessarily have more than a majority of seats in parliament, enough to form a Government on its own (although they may give it enough seats to do so), but they will ensure that one party is ahead of all the others. And they will expect that this party forms

Government with one or two allies. In this way, our citizens will be stating what policies they are expecting.

When our citizens make this decision, they may hand to us a leading party in the form of the BNF or BCP or BMD or MELS. The leading party then would lead a coalition of two parties, or three parties or four parties, whatever the circumstances may dictate. All the other parties will have to accept being led by the largest party. We need to believe that one day, the ruling party will come second or third or fourth among the existing parties. We cannot afford to be the ones that fix the ruling party at first place, and everyone else at second and worse. This is a psychological trap we are creating for ourselves.

Our party, the BMD, is a new formation, in every respect. The nation deserves the time to study us, scrutinize us, learn about us and even advise us without being rushed into it. To expect the people of this nation to learn about our party, and its policies – and at the same time learn about another new Umbrella, all in one swoop, is a major act of unfairness on our part. We are simply expecting too much, and creating the confusion that leaders are ordinarily not expected to cause. We must give the people of this nation the time, ample time, to learn who we are, to assess if we are sincere, to evaluate if we are competent, satisfy themselves that we are organized and grade if our policy programme is substantive enough to cause high impact on the lives of our people.

The agenda of the BMD when in Government is simple, clear and high impact, no matter what our detractors say. Our plans are in place to 1. Create a cutting-edge education system by emphasizing technical, hands-on skills, lifelong learning culture and non-academic capabilities; 2. We will transform our Governance system into an efficient, de-centralized and accountable mechanism in which regions and cities will be managed by directly-elected mayors and Governors, with a caste of competent and empowered human resources; 3. We will deploy, in a smart way, all the resources of our country to create a path for a robust, inclusive, resilient and diversified economy by a) re-organizing some of our niche parastatals into true multinationals b) investing in niche promising sectors such tourism, transport, energy, high-end manufacturing, services-outsourcing, transformation of agriculture and minerals through our smart and elaborate wealth-fund system and c) Investing in a world class physical infrastructure cutting across telecommunication capacity, inland-ports, gas pipelines, water pipelines, road-networks, housing, schools etc;

We will also 4. Ensure individual freedoms, democratic principles and accountability of those who govern are nourished; 5. We will ascertain that those who are left behind by our system are brought into the social and economic mainstream through an elaborate human services system of targeted/cost effective schemes such as education for the disabled, pensions of the elderly, affordable housing for struggling citizens and access to land for either a home or productive activity and 6. We will work to accommodate women as equal partners in the development process and all aspects of our lives.

This is our agenda, and this is what the nation should be given time to learn about us. The current Umbrella coalition talks may well enjoy some support and goodwill especially within the urban centres. And yes, it is generally the feeling in our party, the BMD, that our team at the talks exhibits dedication, diligence and competence in their work. There are things to admire about the other parties too – for instance, the BNF's culture of policy study-groups and their passion to transform our country is a worthwhile asset for the future of our nation. This makes it all the more painful to then still say, the current format of the coalition talks do not mark the right direction - at least for now - for our party the BMD or for Botswana politics.

Of course, all of us within the BMD will support the party proceed with these talks and the implementation of the Umbrella if a majority in our Party feel strongly that we should do so. This is part of the magnificently democratic process that is the culture of our party. Still, the instinct of many in our Party, among whom I am also counted, steadfastly hold that this would not mark the right direction for our Party or our national politics. We should build what is a young promising party first, slowly but surely, and in the process align with one other ally (one at a time), based on natural and mutual admiration, and when this works well, move on to the next ally.

Our giving should be contagious.

September 5, 2010 at 9:53pm

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I spend much of the day travelling back to Gaborone (from Francistown) on an overcrowded bus, Seabelo Express..having arrived early at the departure station to secure myself a vantage seat, and hoping to catch up with my readings. Not everyone secured a seat, so a few people had to stand in the end. After a while, a noticed a woman carrying three children, standing, with her baby sobbing without abatement..I offered her my seat, so I had to stand for most of the journey. Someone then offered me a seat, but I declined, but he insisted citing what I had done for the woman..then someone decided to offer him a seat, also citing what he had done for me. I offered the seat not because I am a gentleman but because, with the passage of time in my life, I have felt the weight of responsibility and duty gravitating upon my shoulders. Responsibility that i may not only receive but that i should be a fountain for giving; that i may not only be led to green pastures but that i should provide sound leadership to those who may not see as well; that i may not only be consoled in tragedy but that i should bring comfort to others when they cross tumultuous waters; that i may not blame others for our misfortunes as a people, but that i should account for my inaction in the midst of trials among our people; that i should not expect that my life should be as cherished as i should cherish the lives of my people, our people. These are my reflections as i read your gracious messages of goodwill, and thought i should share them with you (and may God richly bless all of you). i am moved by the outpouring today, and assure you that i receive your goodwill without any sense that this is what i deserve..in fact, i am deserving of this avalanche of blessings. And the giving, as we witnessed in the bus today, should become contagious, a contagious bug that infects the hearts of

our people. I am grateful to the greatest gift that is the life the Lord has given, and will cherish it while i have it;but should he promote me to another life, no matter the momentary pain it should stamp on others, i will be as equally thankful for his grace and magnificence. Ndaba

A reluctant rebel.

December 10, 2009 at 3:52pm

Gentle, eloquent, dignified and languid Ndaba Gaolathe is Integrity and decency personified. With a risk of possible blasphemy he also is the closest man can get to the kind of humbleness and humility as that preached by the Son of God in the holy book, Writes Oliver Modise.

Before Gomolemo Motswaledi was suspended from his position as Secretary General of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), Ndaba Gaolathe was a little known campaign chairman in the parliamentary candidate's campaign team.

Beyond a family name that linked him to one of the country's most illustrious public figures, few outside Botswana's financial and banking circle had ever heard of Ndaba Gaolathe.

But ever since Motswaledi's suspension, Ndaba's stature as a shrewd strategist with an original mind has been all that those in the behind the scenes planning are talking about.

Beyond that, his writings also paint a picture of a young man with a versatile and radical mind who somehow found himself inside a staunchly conservative party.

Clearly a man ahead of his time, Ndaba was the first to condemn Motswaledi's suspension. This was at a time when everyone else was mumbling and muttering, too afraid to question the authority behind the hand that signed Motswaledi's letter of suspension and his ultimate fate into political wilderness.

To everyone's shock, Ndaba stated in clear terms in a lengthy letter published in a mid-week paper that he did not recognise Motswaledi's suspension.

Prior to that, he was the first, and probably the only BDP member to speak against the brutal killing of John Kalafatis.

Who really is this Ndaba Gaolathe?

Born in September 1972, Ndaba is the son of the Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Baledzi Gaolathe. He is a graduate of George Washington University where he obtained two Bachelor's degrees, one in mathematics and the other in economics.

A graduate from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Ndaba comes across as an unwilling politician who prefers to stay behind the scenes.

"Don't forget that my family is well represented in the public space. There is no need for me to be on the news," implying that he will not compete for media attention with his father; a former Permanent Secretary, a former Debswana MD, Former Bank of Botswana Governor and BDC's longest serving board member.

When Motswaledi lost his first High Court case that challenged his suspension as secretary general of the BDP, Gaolathe was one of those who persuaded him to appeal insisting that theirs was not a war on individuals.

Taking the stage before Motswaledi at a press organised to thank the nation for their support and give reasons behind the appeal, Ndaba said the decision to appeal was a challenge on decisions that contravened the spirit of the BDP's traditions.

Throughout the case he stood by Motswaledi, insisting to anybody who would listen that at issue was not Motswaledi but the ideals of democracy and fairness on which Botswana was founded.

Ndaba was shocked by the harsh treatment the BDP was meting on his friend. In fact this was not the BDP that he had joined.

“The fear of backlash from some in our own party or the fear of further punishment should not cause us to abandon the ideals that attracted us to the BDP. Fairness, integrity, firmness, collective democracy, truth and service are some of the ideals that we have promised to uphold and continue to uphold.”

When many friends and erstwhile factional buddies were too afraid to stand next to Motswaledi, Ndaba stood firm and publicly endorsed Motswaledi’s right to appeal.

“To throw away our stand would amount to the abandonment of our core values. We will have given up what we can become, as a people.”

Though firm and one may say defiant, he preached discipline to those who sympathised with Motswaledi’s cause.

“Ours is not a war on individuals,” he insisted.

“It is a direct and fair challenge on decisions we believe contravene the spirit of our democratic tradition. It is not a disrespect for our leadership; it is the honouring of the teachings of our elders. It is not empty defiance; it is a stand on the firm foundations that form the promise of an uplifting future for generations to come. It is not a selfish quest to thrust a colleague onto the corridors of

power; it is a patient faith in which our colleague and candidate is aware he may lose both the case and the opportunity to serve in parliament. It is not an abandonment of the ways our great movement, the BDP; it is a revival of the high vows of our part.”

While many were tempted to throw stones at the judiciary for dismissing Motswaledi’s case, Ndaba called for restraint.

“We lost the first case but we must not impugn the integrity of our judiciary – they are learned, experienced and wise old men and women that deserve our respect. Our values mean we cannot allow resentment and bitterness to corrode the force of our good intents. We will not lose hope. We do not see ourselves as victims but as stewards. We will not tire, because all that is right will outlast even the mountains. And we will not mourn in defeat, or be triumphalist in victory.”

Always wearing a contemplative face, he was neither smiling nor frustrated when the Court of Appeal also dismissed Motswaledi’s application.

To him such events were a precursor to “winds of change.”

“I don’t think nor believe that my friend has struggled against the President nor the constitution of Botswana . Neither of us has seen the unfolding of this matter in those terms, but that is a matter that deserves to be treated on its own on another day.”

He however does not hide his disappointment at the unfairness with which Motswaledi has been treated. He does not say by who.

“What pained me, of course, was to see a young luminary portrayed in ways other than in terms of the talent, character and hope that he represents.”

In what could be warning to those who think Motswaledi is finished, Ndaba insists Motswaledi’s loss at the courts and subsequent failure to run for parliament does not mean his political career is over.

“Holding a position in the BDP or in party politics has never been a driving force behind Motswaledi’s vision. His aspiration is to serve, like a true servant, the people of Botswana on or out of an office platform. His future, that of potential service to the people of Botswana has escalated in its glow.”

But what informs Ndaba’s character.

He says he looks at himself as a graduate of his parents’ teachings.

“They gave lessons, not by words, but by their life and ways; humility, fairness, diligence, faith, moral soundness, focus, tenacity, patience, honesty and sense of purpose,” says the young Gaolathe.

That is perhaps why he is worried that the spirit of selflessness that used to exist among Batswana is dying. He says despite that, he still believes that the youth have the potential to lift the banner higher.

“Self-discipline and self-belief remain gaps that we need to work on to realise our full potential as a generation, both of which are within reach,” he says.

Other than his involvement in politics, Gaolathe comes across as a man who believes in imparting knowledge to the youth.