



A nostalgia note

Thirty-eight year anniversary of Ray Purcell and Mokoro

By Ray Purcell

I had the pleasure of working in the Botswana civil service in the 1970s, but not via the ODI fellowship route. I worked as a contracted officer in the Ministry of Agriculture where Andrew Bird and I worked closely together for a time. Andrew gave me my first lesson in how to write a decent report, with the use of his swingeing red pencil. Along with other Mokorans, notably Stephen and Philip Lister, Andrew became a bastion of my professional development.

I also came into contact at the Botswana Planning Officer meetings, with those other clever young ODIs (Stephen Lister and Steve McCarthy in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Steve Mandel in Transport) who were to give birth to Mokoro, post-Botswana.

I didn't move in the same social milieu, however, as these nerdy geeks. Mine was at the semi-colonial setting of the Gaborone Club, where, as captain for a couple of years, I take satisfaction for helping to take the Gaborone Club soccer team into a more multiracial era. Interest in Footballers' Wives wasn't a factor. One of the younger ODIs on the team was Suma Chakrabarti, the former Permanent Secretary of DFID, President of EBRD etc – "go up front, on the left, Suma". I wish I had said "please" more often!

Seven years in Botswana morphed into a career as a freelance consultant. I was a Mokoro associate from Mokoro's beginnings, and became a member in 1999. One of my claims to fame was my involvement in the first Mokoro team consultancy in Uganda in 1983. This, I was reminded by Philip, led to the purchase of Mokoro's first computer, and provided a sturdy test of character for all on the team.

Who on the Uganda Recovery Programme team (Allison, Isaksen, Lister, Mandel, Purcell, Walker) will forget the two months in 1983 in Kampala's V(N)ile Mansions, with its flocks of benighted, scavenging marabou storks, Obote's security services hauling suspects up the stairs of the hotel, shots upstairs in the night, and our intrepid team leader (Stephen Lister) complaining about the noise to our counterpart Minister!? Just as scary was travelling through road blocks manned by heavily drunken and drugged soldiers. I have been more scared, in the border areas of Sudan, but there lie other stories.

And the relaxation of the week, the muster at the Kampala British High Commission Bar at 5pm on a Friday evening. Good intentions about leaving in time to beat the 7pm curfew were never realised. Somehow, we just couldn't drink up in time to make the curfew bell. And the curfew was breached as we scuttled, crouching/cowering low to avoid being sighted by the police, half crazed with beer and fear, the half mile back to Vile Mansions – or certainly I did.

The Public Investment Program and Public Expenditure Review exercises in Ghana in the mid 1980s were a doddle by comparison, but not without sadness. We lost one of our associates, Brian Cooke, around that time. Other team missions, with Andrew Bird, Anne Bartholomew, Catherine Dom, Charles Harvey, Martin Adams, Mary Betley, Stephen Lister, and more recently, collaborations with Kit Nicholson, Liz Daley, Chris Tanner and the brilliant plural members of our office team over the years, have provided me with great memories, friendships, professional experience and mutual support. Working with a uniquely trust-based, top development organisation, whose operational success has long defied the principles of management theory, and where I haven't been bossed about, has been perfect for me. So thanks Mokoro and Mokorans, for the friendship and professional satisfaction of the last thirty eight years. I toast and look forward to the next twenty five years of Mokoro. Whatever its evolutions, and twists and turns, it will be what its members want it to be.



Ray Purcell (front, centre) with Mokoro colleagues.