

## **Death of a Giant: Accounting for Basotho National Party Dismal Performance in 2007 Elections.**

### **Abstract**

A party which win's election is invariably a party that enjoys a good reputation and is able to attract potential voters. It is a party, which crystallises super performance in by-elections and has excellent record of holding the current government to account. Of course, it must have admirable record in opposition boosted by its impeccable leadership and party unity that reflect its readiness to govern. The paper analyses the decline of Basotho National Party (BNP) from a giant status to a minority party. It sets itself specifically to address the following objectives; can the party wins the elections despite its seemingly poor leadership, poor organisation, party weaknesses and disunity which pervade the whole party structures. The paper concludes that, it was these factors that contributed to BNP dismal performance in 2007 elections and seemingly deathlike status in Lesotho political landscape.

### **Introduction**

Any assessment of political parties must take into consideration that “democratic parties are associations of like-minded people who, by means of popular elections, compete for state power to further their common goals” (Crew 1993, p83). Political parties must bring these common goals, varied, as they might be, together in order to form a coherent all embracing political programme that will assist them to win the next elections. A party, which fails to perform this critical task, is destined to lose general elections (my emphasis).

Political parties are, therefore, an aggregation of many interests. There is a voluminous literature on political parties. Nevertheless, a political party “refers to an association of citizens who share a set of basic political views that they seek to advance by presenting candidates for elective offices” (Ceaser 1990, p96). Without this consensus, a party will find it difficult to compete as a united organ and win an election. The party must, therefore, have enduring institutional arrangements in order to win an election. Similarly, for political parties to “win elections parties must attract support from many different groups in the electorate”(Crew 1993, p83). This means that they must bring both their current

and prospective voter's interests together and create consensus across a large segment of the population.

Parties must also be able to respond to the voters' interests and expectations. This is because, "political parties constitute an important element of modern government"(Nnoli1986, p139). They are a major organising principle of contemporary politics. Parties form a crucial link between all sectors of the society and the state. It is only political parties within society among other groups, which are able to form modern governments, which translate voters' interests into national policies.

Since Lesotho's independence in 1966, the BNP was seen as the largest party in Lesotho that went on to win the first post independence elections with a slender margin of 31 seats in a 60-member parliament. This situation was to change drastically after 2007, February 17 general elections, as will be show below. In 1970, the party lost general election even though the results were never announced. Consequently, the state of emergency was declared and the Constitution was suspended. From this period, the BNP went on to rule illegally. Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan (BNP-Leader) even went to inform the Nation that he had suspended the Constitution and declared that "I have seized power and I am not ashamed of it" (Khaketla 1971, p226). The era of authoritarian and oppression had arrived. The state machinery especially the army was unleashed on opposition supporters who took refuge in neighbouring countries. The era of impunity continued. These were some of the events that appear to have influenced voters to desert the BNP.

The party was removed from power in January 1986 when the Military in a coup d'etat took over. The party has been out of power for twenty (20) years since it was toppled by its current leader Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya (Cape Argus 1986). Since the dawn of democratisation in 1993, the party has found it difficult to win elections. However, in 2002 Lesotho put in place a mixed member proportional representation electoral system. According to this system, the National Assembly will be composed of 120 seats. 80 seats will be allocated in the present Single-Member Simple Plurality (SMSP, also known as the First-

past-the-post) model (Lijphart 2000). While 40 seats will be allocated on the Proportional Representation model and allocated as compensatory seats (Lesotho National Election: 2002). The BNP was able to capture twenty one (21) of the forty proportional seats out of the 120 National Assembly seats reserved for smaller parties. The major question now is whether the party can improve its electoralability and win any elections in Lesotho?

### **2007 BNP Electoral Challenges**

The party, which is likely to win election, is evaluated on its “performance or party program” (Peele et al 1992, p64), more especially during the by-elections or by frequently holding the government accountable on all fronts. The BNP has not performed well on this score. The BNP has not been participating in by-elections since 1993. Reasons advanced for boycotting the by-elections were not clear. What baffled most commentators was that the second largest party in the country was not participating in by-elections, hence; a political party must participate in elections, not outside elections. How was the BNP going to judge its performance and galvanise its support if it did not participate in elections? These were some of the hard questions that the party could not answer. The continued BNP non-participation in by-elections has made it difficult to judge with certainty, the extent of its support base (Likoti 2005). There are several challenges facing the BNP, more especially when it is approaching the 2007 elections. Never before has the party been confronted with so many problems before democratic elections. These challenges include party leadership, party organisation, party factionalism and some of the weaknesses the party appears to be experiencing. It is this challenges that we now to discuss.

### **Party Leadership**

One of the major challenges facing the BNP as it approaches the 2007 elections is the party leadership. The issue of leadership has always been very important to most social scientists. It has often been argued that the need for leadership is always signalled by its absence. In fact, “More often a vague feeling that the

organisation or part of it is out of control and everyone is powerless to do anything it is an indication of a leadership vacuum" (Fidler 1997). This situation describes the prevailing environment within the BNP as will be demonstrated below. In fact, leadership is associated with such activities as providing solutions to problems (Leithwood et al, 1995), formulating and communicating a strategy based on a vision of a better future (Fidler et al.1996) and inspiring followers to strive towards it.

Most members of the BNP have placed the major demise of the party on lack of leadership by the current leader General Justin Metsing Lekhanya (Malefane 2006). They accuse him of ruling the party by de-facto powers rather than de-Jure powers. They have singled out Lekhanya as a major contributor to the BNP electoral defeat in 2002. They charged Lekhanya for having discredited the party in the past and currently (Malefane 2006). In fact, the current woes of the BNP are blamed solely on Lekhanya's inability to lead the party. Most importantly, one prominent party member Leseteli Malefane and others argue that he lacks leadership skills to lead such a major opposition party in Lesotho and therefore the best thing he could do for the sake of the party and everybody else is to step down ceremoniously. These concerns have made the party leadership appear weak and lacking the vision. Similarly, they do not even augur well for a party facing general elections in 2007.

Among other accusations levelled against the current BNP leader has been that of deposing the founding leader of the party Chief Leabua Jonathan on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1986 (Malefane 2006). Some BNP members assert that he (Lekhanya) did this even though he claimed to be a BNP member. Lekhanya is charged with denying Jonathan his human rights of consulting doctors outside the country after the coup. This refusal consequently led to Jonathan's ultimate death. This action was seen as a death sentence handed to him by General Lekhanya who was a military ruler in Lesotho during this period. Even after Jonathan's death, Lekhanya is claimed to have refused to hold a state funeral for him (Malefane 2006). As such, Lekhanya is the last person to invoke impeccable BNP credentials to lead the party to any electoral victory. These actions have

presented the current BNP leader as merciless and cruel, not only to the potential BNP voters, but to its founding leader Leabua Jonathan.

Lekhanya's actions not only destroyed the BNP electoral chances, but also contributed immensely in eroding BNP achievements during its twenty-year rule after toppling Jonathan from power. All BNP developments were erased by the military junta under Lekhanya's leadership. Furthermore, he purged most BNP supporters from public service and replaced them with members of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) (Malefane 2006). These were done in order to impress the opposition parties at the time mainly the BCP and others. Therefore, he is seen as the worst enemy of BNP who cannot be able to deliver any electoral victory whatsoever. It was inconceivable to see him clinging to BNP leadership without remembering these actions that he committed against the party.

The whole world knows very well that it was Lekhanya who removed King Moshoeshoe II from his throne and even attempted to select the King's successor from his junior family (Malefane 2006). This has been the reason why prospective voters do not trust BNP under his leadership. It can be argued that, since the Chieftainship is so entrenched in Lesotho, some voters appear timid about a leader who initially took an oath to protect the Royal family and subsequently disposed the King. This is crucial because the King is seen as a symbol of national unity among the Basotho Nation. The Kingship institution is very important because the King is the head of state. They argue that prospective voters are very sceptical to vote for BNP under the current leader who they perceive as a loose cannon and dangerous to this national institution (Kingship Institution) (Malefane 2006). Therefore, the party must first rid itself of Lekhanya to be more electable.

After 2002, Lekhanya had reluctantly conceded defeat. This can be assumed by the fact that he agreed to the independent mediator's<sup>1</sup> pressure to recognise the elections and go to parliament. It was in parliament when Lekhanya decided that

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<sup>1</sup> The Mediators were led by the Executive members of Lesotho Network for Conflict Management. It was through this mediation in April 2002 that Lekhanya after protracted negotiations agreed to concede defeat and allowed his party to take party in parliament.

his status as one of the leader's of the official opposition parties was not enough. It would appear that he wanted more. His current position was too low to influence events in the government. On realising this situation, on February 12<sup>th</sup> 2003, Lekhanya and his current Deputy, Mr J.K. Mollo, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister Mosisili proposing that they be included in his cabinet so that the BNP could be able to recognise the 2002 May election. The most controversial issue of this supposed settlement was the inclusion of a South African Farmer Mr. Van Zyl. This letter was rejected with scorn by the government. They argued that the provision of Mr Van Zyl was laughable firstly because he was not a Lesotho citizen and therefore not even a member of BNP. Secondly, he was a personal friend of Mr Lekhanya whom he had granted a lease within Lesotho Highlands Water Project during the period of military government in blatant contravention of international law. The government argues, "as such it is not only pitiful but laughable as a reflection of the depth to which the BNP (as the second largest political party in Lesotho) has sunk" (Seitlheko 2003, pp1-6). It was this embarrassment, among others, which was blamed on Lekhanya's lack of leadership, vision and serious commission of blatant political mistakes, which eroded the BNP image.

Lekhanya is also charged with having established an armed task force within the party. It was alleged that, this task force intimidated BNP members and planted explosives at the homestead of some senior members of the party such as Member of Parliament (MP) Thabang Nyeoe whom Lekhanya perceived him as a threat to his leadership.

This task force on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2005 disrupted and expelled some party members from the BNP annual national conference who were calling for democratic elections within the party, particularly party leadership. The BNP image was tarnished further when Lekhanya's task force expelled 43 constituencies represented in this conference. These expelled members were forced to seek redress before the High Court of Lesotho.

In September 2005, the BNP crisis came to the fore when a Chairman of Maseru district constituencies and also head of the above task force to Intimidated

(Statement of the Speaker of the Lesotho Parliament 2005) and petitioned the Honourable Speaker of Lesotho National Assembly claiming that she acted unparliamentarily, by having nominated a senior BNP MP Bereng Sekhonya to attend an international conference (Lekhanya 2005). The task force did this well aware that their protest action against the Parliament Speaker was illegal (Malefane 2006).

This BNP task force leader Motloheloa Khaka does not hold any office within the BNP Executive Committee. He is also not a member of parliament, but rumoured to be closely linked to the BNP Leader himself. Khaka wrote a letter on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2005 to the Speaker of the National Assembly (Khaka 2005). In this letter he informed the Speaker that the BNP will partition the parliament on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005 around 1100 am in relation to her relationships with the BNP Whips, more in particular the Speaker's unilateral appointment of BNP MPs, to attend conferences in and out of the country. Notwithstanding the fact that these petitioners appear ignorant about parliamentary procedures, the Speaker reported the contents of this petition to parliament on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2005 (Daily Hazard 2005).

While most parliamentarians were appalled by this BNP move, one BNP MP Tyhali, disassociated himself and others with the petitioner's letter. He asserted that it seemed that Khaka was about to contravene laws regarding privileges, peace and stability in the country. He argues that, Khaka has no right to petition parliament and track the BNP into his confusion together with his supporters.

In concurrence with his colleague, Moupo Mathaba, a BNP Chief Whip disassociated himself and BNP with what he termed criminal activities of people who claim to represent the BNP. He reminded parliament that parties should work tirelessly to build peace before asking the nation to do likewise. For another BNP MP, Bereng Sekhonya, opined that the petitioners' letter was disgraceful. He added that parliament belongs to the King and it was unfortunate that such a highly respected house is being verbally abused for exercising its prerogatives of assigning its member to represent the King's parliament in Botswana. He concluded that this parliament should not entertain this kind of

correspondence. It was ludicrous for a parliament of ten parties to be subjected to this criminal behaviour by the petitioners (Daily Hazard 2005).

Conversely, the leader of the BNP appears vested with the mission and letter of the petitioners unlike his colleagues. He argues that,

...all BNP members in parliament are governed by the BNP Head Office, directly. We are responsible to our party; we are party members who are controlled by the party. Mr. Khaka and others are under the direction of the party and its leadership. This was in regard to internal administration, relating to the Chief Whip and party caucus and so on. This included those members who have not been attending these caucuses. We are controlled by the petitioners, they are our peers, they are charged with the responsibility of directing the party (Daily Hazard 2005, p2).

From this leadership admission of this political illegality, it was clear that some senior BNP members in parliament including the party leader have used Khaka and others in order to avoid disciplinary action in parliament. It was also clear that BNP in parliament was divided judging from the above statements by its members of Parliament who are apparently pulling in different directions as far as this matter is concerned. This damaging political incident seemed to have created a lasting image on the party and its prospects for winning the next elections. The BNP appears to be engaged in fuelling conflicts rather than building peace by engaging in controversial petitions to discredit parliament and create unnecessary confusion.

To date, the BNP has not yet pointed out the legislation that the Speaker contravened by appointing Bereng Sekhonyana MP to represent Lesotho Parliament in Botswana (Malefane 2006). What is clear is that Lekhanya and his task force continue to embellish and discredit the BNP image and limit its electoral chances. These actions presented BNP as a party, which is not conversant with legislation governing parliament and other importance parliamentary procedures, which a party of its stature is supposed to be conversant with. These deeds presented the BNP as a party, which galvanise its



support by playing on people's fears unnecessarily. Mobilising controversy for votes has no place in democratic Lesotho.

Lekhanya's entrenched disgust for highly educated people has been cited as another factor that reduces BNP electoral opportunities. While a military leader, he is claimed to have repudiated an academic degree such as the PhD acronym (Daily Hazard 2005) as meaning "Pull Him Down". He claimed then that the bunch of "Pull Him Down" academics wants to topple his military government by mobilising people to push for the introduction of pluralistic politics. It was this derogative PhD meaning that singled out Lekhanya as a person who hates academics (Daily Hazard 2005, p3). It was argued that, because of his secondary education, he is very fearful of any member of the party who possesses degrees (Daily Hazard 2005). This was the reason why he purged his first deputy leader Bereng Sekhonyana MP, Party Chairman, Mr Moupo Mathaba MP and two former Secretary Generals; Leseteli Malefane MP and Molapo Majara (Likoti 2005) on the pretext that they were undisciplined.

Lekhanya's fear of academics contrasts sharply with Chief Jonathan's style of leadership who used to surround himself with people with high degrees. Conversely, Lekhanya sees them as a threat to his political power. Most prospective voters see Lekhanya's mockery of academic qualifications as a danger to national education if BNP ever came to power under his leadership. It has been this genuine fear that people have which present a major challenge that has severely limited the party's chances for victory in 2007.

The BNP leader has been accused of insulting other BNP parliamentarians who have refused to concede to his damaging actions against the parliament, the nation and the party image. While these actions are not new, judging from his previous ousting of King Moshoeshoe II, he is seen as disobeying the King's oath by insulting his parliamentarians (Likoti 2006).

### **Party Organisation**

The BNP was started almost twenty years ago when Lekhanya toppled the late Dr Leabua Jonathan as discussed above. The BNP as an organisation has

always been in a shambles since 1986. This is more so under the leadership of its current leader Metsing Lekhanya. The party has been unable to participate in by-elections in order to assess its support. Probably this was because the party organisation was almost eroded by the purges, which were pursued with more vigour by the military government. Since 2002 elections, the party has not been able to organise properly in order to contest by-elections, which came into being as a result of deaths of some Members of Parliament. The following are some of the by-elections that the party failed to organise and field delegates to stand for these elections in table 1 below;

**Table1: Lesotho Parliamentary by-elections from February 2003 to February 2005**

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Election Date</i>	<i>Registered voters</i>	<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>Voter Turnout</i>
<i>Motete</i>	<i>15-Feb-2003</i>	<i>11,768</i>	<i>3,945</i>	<i>34%</i>
<i>Qhoali</i>	<i>23-Aug-2003</i>	<i>10,929</i>	<i>3,516</i>	<i>32%</i>
<i>Khafung</i>	<i>23-Aug-2003</i>	<i>11,391</i>	<i>4,280</i>	<i>38%</i>
<i>Thaba-Putsoa</i>	<i>24-Jan-2004</i>	<i>13,319</i>	<i>3,353</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Motimposo</i>	<i>24-Apr-2004</i>	<i>13,125</i>	<i>1,712</i>	<i>13%</i>
<i>Mohobollo</i>	<i>5-Jun-2004</i>	<i>9,999</i>	<i>1,690</i>	<i>17%</i>
<i>Qhoali</i>	<i>16-Oct-2004</i>	<i>11,820</i>	<i>3,155</i>	<i>27%</i>
<i>Koro-Koro</i>	<i>12-Feb-2005</i>	<i>9,186</i>	<i>2,542</i>	<i>28%</i>

*Source Independent Electoral Commission*

All these bye-elections were won by the ruling LCD with surprisingly low percentages illustrated above because there was no credible contender. BNP could not contest these elections. This was another squandered opportunity that the BNP could have used to galvanise its support.

Lack of party organisation was so omnipresent within the party when it held its 2005 December 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> annual conference. There was no party organisation visible for this conference. Only few close a supporters of the current leadership were invited, while most of the party constituencies committees were never notified. According to the party conference minutes, when some members asked the leadership about the absence of many constituencies at the conference, the response was swift and precise. People who have been invited have been sifted out of the unnecessary chaff, which was discarded. This was the affirmative response from the current BNP leadership. They argued that only deserving candidates were invited (Resolutions of BNP 2005). The challenge was that most

people who were present as delegates in this conference were individuals who were not members of their home constituencies. Some of them were known to come from certain constituencies, and as such, they were deliberately invited to represent those constituencies without regard to notification of substantive constituencies' office bearers.

It so occurred that a certain Mr. Thabang Ts'ira, a Chairman of Abia constituency, became aware of this somewhat covert conference and gate crashed the gathering on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2005. The current BNP Secretary General, Chief Ranthomeng Matete, immediately spotted him. The Abia Chairman (The Report of Abia No36 Constituency 2005) was called names, hackled and expelled from the conference at gun-point under the orders of the party secretary. Furthermore, the BNP Leader who was present in this meeting ordered members of his task force to ensure that the gate-crasher was driven out of the conference premises. These actions reflect the fact that if the party organisation was functioning, the Chairman of Abia constituency and of course other constituencies ought to have been invited to the conference. The selective invitation to the party conference was also an indication that the BNP as a party cannot even be able to organise for its own internal conference, what more for the next general elections? Party organisation, remains a distance mirage for the BNP, let alone the capacity to organise for such a massive focused campaign like the 2007 elections.

Party organisation has also been pervasive at the constituency level. For instance, several constituencies such those of Hlotse, Moyeni, Tele, Mokhotlong, Roma and others were appalled by the above covert conference together with its resolutions that purported to have expelled and ordered the NEC to institute disciplinary procedures against some prominent party members from various constituencies (Resolutions of BNP 2005). The Roma constituency committee wrote to the Executive Committee of BNP to protest against the supposed expulsion of their member Leseteli Malefane MP without consultation with his constituency of which they were not even invited to attend the above conference (Letter from Maama No. 40 Constituency 2006). These protestations were the

cases in point with other party branches. Subsequently, the Roma constituency disassociated themselves from the illegal actions of the above conference and affirmed Malefane MP as a substantive member of the BNP. They argued that these events created unnecessary confusion and limited their chances to win the 2007 elections.

The issue of poor party organisation was even more profound at the beginning of 2006. It became more explicit when the public gatherings for the BNP leader failed to take off in Leribe, Maputsoe, Butha-Buthe, Mokhotlong Qacha'snek, Qoalinyane, Quthing and Mophale'shoek. These areas represent almost two thirds of Lesotho voters. In all these areas, the intended gatherings had to be abandoned because of poor party organisation. In almost all these constituencies no arrangements were made with the party leadership for such gatherings with local committees. The main reason here was the issue of party factionalism, which will be discussed below. These committees have since aligned themselves with other leadership within the party as opposed to the current one. In some cases, people defied the leadership and refused to attend these gatherings in areas such as Qoalinyane, Butha-Buthe, Maputsoe, Matelile and Leribe. Nevertheless, where the party was able to convene these public gatherings the attendance was extremely poor to say the least. In fact, out of fourteen committee members at Peka and Roma only three and two attended respectively while the rest of the committee members disassociated themselves with Lekhanya's leadership. It was apparent from these developments that BNP poor organisation has contributed to its demise. For a party to govern, it must have a solid party organisation that can stand the test of time. The BNP in its current form cannot meet this challenge. It was this party organisation that has characterised the BNP as a party incapable of governing the country again.

### **Party factionalism**

Following the 2002 National Executive Council elections, the BNP intra-party conflict became more pronounced. While this did not lead to fragmentations of the party, General Lekhanya successfully engineered the election defeat of his

previous members of National Executive. This was except for two members who were seen to be very close to him. This created great animosity within the party and to the extent that the BNP lost its value in Parliament as a leading opposition party. Among its twenty-one Members of Parliament, eighteen of them openly opposed the leadership and engaged in unsuccessful efforts to oust the General from the leadership of the party.

These disgruntled MPs have since put forward their leadership choice as Thabang Nyeoe. The BNP Executive only acknowledged his candidature (Nyeoe 2005) by putting a stamp on his letter to the Executive, but came short of informing the party supporters in a democratic way as mandated by their Constitution. What emerged from these seemingly undemocratic events was a faction under Nyeoe known as the BNP-Struggle for Democratic Change (BNP-SDC). The agenda of this faction was clear, "unseat Lekhanya and put the BNP back on the electable path" (Public eye Newspaper 2006). This faction appears to have been successful in mobilising disgruntled BNP supporters. They have been able to hold successful public gatherings in most places where Lekhanya and his Executive committee have failed (Public eye Newspaper 2006). Their popularity also motivated the December 2005 covert BNP conference to issue a resolution that sought, though unsuccessfully, to expel them from the party (Resolution of BNP 2005). They were charged for bringing the party into disrepute (The BNP Charge Sheet 2006). Among other charges they were accused of holding public gatherings without seeking permission from the leadership. However, the BNP-SDC appears to be unrelenting in its efforts to mobilise party supporters against the current leadership.

In a twist of events, early in January 2006 some concerned groups within the BNP have made feverish attempts to bring the two factions to the table. They called themselves Action Group for BNP Unity (Maseribane 2006). This group has been relatively successful to bring both sides together to draw the BNP working paper aiming at tackling the 2007 elections. All these groups endorsed the document (Proposed BNP Document 2006). The document even though accepted in principles by all groups, has subsequently been repudiated by the

BNP Executive Committee even though they initially participated in its drawing and signing. They rejected (Moholi 2006) both the efforts of Action group for attempting to bring the conflict to finality and argued that they do not recognise the Action Group with its entire membership and the so-called BNP-SDC. They argued that there were no factions within the BNP and as such they refuse to recognise anyone who holds a different view (Undated BNP Press). The BNP Executive argued that they will not talk to any group(s) or anybody on BNP issues and such persons should approach the party structures. The irony here as explained above, has been that the so called party structures do not exist and even where they are available they are more aligned to BNP-SDC rather than the current BNP leadership (Maseribane 2006). It is, therefore, clear that the party is refusing to engage in peaceful negotiations. A daunting questions still remains whether the BNP see itself ready for 2007 victory or not? Yet, the party is engulfed by severe weaknesses.

### **BNP Weaknesses**

The BNP has a number of weaknesses that have undermined its capacity; these include lack of financial resources, low morale among some party officials and rank and file as well as weak leadership since the overthrow of Jonathan in 1986. Money is a crucial part of the party's survival kit since it is needed to implement party's strategic agenda at all levels, thus, the scarce party finances need to be managed well and continuously augmented in order to ensure financial stability. Coupled with the inadequate financial resources is the history of poor financial management practices in the party from the era of the late Rets'elisitsoe Sekhonyana to the current BNP leader General Lekhanya. The Party has had no operating budget approved by the relevant party organs. The expenditure has been haphazard, inconsistent, and irregular and indeed, there has been a plethora of accounting and financial control problems (Proposed BNP Document 2006). In addition, the party accounts have not been produced as per the generally accepted accounting standards. With this kind of financial reputation, is

very unlikely that any potential donor could be found to fund the party programme for the next General elections.

This party has a weak moral fibre among the voters as a result of its failure to accept elections defeats. The BNP reputation to accept election results since 1970 have created a perception among voters as a party, which does not recognise elections that it has lost. When the party realised that it was likely to lose the 1970 elections, it seized power by force until Lekhanya toppled it in 1986. On March 27<sup>th</sup> 1993, the BNP lost second democratic election since the country's return to democratic order. The party refused to accept defeat and presented the high Court with 28 election petitions in an attempt to set aside the election results. The full bench of the High Court led by Mr. Justice Cullinan dismissed all these petitions and argued:

... I am drawn to the inevitable conclusion therefore that these petitions were filed solely as a matter of political expediency...In holding that the General Elections were free and fair, I am in good company. I share that view with 130 International observers, from 30 countries and 16 different organisations who observed all stages of the elections (Seitlheko 2003).

In 1998 the BNP petitioned the high Court, once again the decision was the same as above. The party claims were similarly thrown out of court. The same pattern of events continued again after 2002 elections. None of these petitions succeeded. These events do not augur well for BNP. Instead they have tainted its image and weakened the party fundamentally.

One of the most serious weaknesses of the BNP has been its Constitution. The party has two Constitutions; the Sesotho and English versions<sup>2</sup>. The English version grants the party leader a four-year term limit while the Sesotho version demands a vote of confidence without specifying any term of office. These contradictions in both Constitutions have given rise to misinterpretations and misuse by different factions in order to justify their actions. Currently the BNP leadership claims that Lekhanya was given a vote of confidence to continue to

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<sup>2</sup> Both these Constitutions were registered in October 1985 under company's registration act at the Law office in Lesotho.

lead the party by December 2005 conference. This claim therefore, invokes the Sesotho version of the BNP constitution. Conversely, the BNP-SDC argues that according to the English version, Lekhanya's tenure has long lapsed. They insist that he must be democratically elected by all delegates in order to continue to rule the party. This is in accordance with the English version of the Constitution. This apparent lack of leadership term limits hinders advancement within the party. It was also for this reason that the party lacks a clear succession plan.

The other weakness of the party relates to political education. The party has been unable to educate its members and prospective members about its values and ideological position on many issues. This has contributed to the party lacking critical analysis on important issues relating to both its internal and external politics. This limitation has created communication problems within the party and beyond. Consequently the party has become inefficient and not transparent in communicating its message to prospective voters and current membership.

The failure to establish clear and transparent communication networks has contributed to the weakness of party structures at both the local and regional levels. The party has not been able to utilise the media to its benefit and as such has not been able to engage in current political debates. This has been exacerbated by its lack of use of newspapers, radio and internal structures for communication with grassroots support. Therefore, the party has not been able to create clear and coherent political programmes and consequently failed to connect with the youth and other important sectors such as the Non-governmental organisation and other influential organisations. This was because the party marketing strategy was poor to say the least. It cannot be able to market itself under the current challenges to be an electable political party ready to govern in 2007.

One of the major limitations within the party has been its lack of intra-party democracy. BNP in recent years has been successful in nurturing an undemocratic culture within the party as has been alluded to above. In any democracy, political parties form a critical pillar for entrenchment of democratic culture and practice. This means, among other things, that for parties to add



value to democratisation at national level, they ought to embrace and institutionalise internal democracy. Since they play a crucial role in the democratic process, “it is also incontrovertible that political parties are the key to the institutionalisation and consolidation of democracy. Thus, sustainable democracy is dependent upon well-functioning and effective political parties” (Matlosa et al 2005, p vii.).

Despite this belief the BNP appears not to have subscribed to this normative value of democracy. The party has become intolerant for dissent and internal criticism. This has made a party to be out of touch with its grassroots support base. The BNP’s performance in Parliament left much to be desired. Since it lacked proper mechanism to ameliorate internal discontent and build an internal democratic culture, the party began to wash its linen in public by chastising its Members of Parliament who wanted democracy within the party. It was this lack of intra-party democracy, which led to disunity, especially in Parliament. The Leader of the party, General Lekhanya accused the reformist element within the party of fighting the leadership and, instead, adhering to the ruling party influence. The truth of the matter was that in 2003, General Lekhanya, together with his Deputy had unilaterally written to the government without consulting the party. They wished to seek Government of National Unity and certain ministerial positions. The Government rejected these demands with scorn as indicated above. These weaknesses have made the party unelectable and it is difficult to see how it can win the 2007 elections.

### **The 2007 February Elections**

The February 17, 2007 elections were necessitated by a split within the ruling party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) in October 2006. The splinter party, the All Basotho Convention (ABC), was founded by a populist former cabinet Minister, who exploited traditional divisions between the BNP and the LCD, subsequently attracting a large BNP following. The formation of ABC appears to have put the last nail on the BNP coffin as the party votes declines in just 3 elections as the table 2 illustrates below.

***Table2: The 1998-2007 Lesotho General Elections: Showing how the BNP has Drastically Lost the National Vote in each election.***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Main Parties</b>	<b>No. of Votes</b>	<b>%of Votes</b>	<b>No, of Seats</b>
<b>1998</b>	LCD	355,049	60.7	79
	BNP	<b>143,073</b>	24.5	1
	BCP	61,793	10.5	0
	MFP	7,460	1.3	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>582,740</b>	100.0	80
<b>2002</b>	LCD	304,316	54.8	77
	BNP	<b>124,234</b>	22.4	21
	LPC	32,046	5.8	5
	NIP	30,346	5.5	5
	BAC	16,095	2.9	3
	BCP	14,584	2.7	3
	LWP	7,788	1.4	1
	MFP	6,890	1.2	1
	PFD	6,330	1.1	1
	NPP	3,985	0.7	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>554,386</b>	100.0	118
<b>2007</b>	LCD/NIP	229,602	68.9	82
	ABC/LWP	107,463	22.7	27
	BNP	<b>29,965</b>	2.5	3
	ACP	20,263	1.7	2
	PFD	15,477	0.8	1
	BCP	9,823	0.8	1
	MFP	9,129	0.8	1
	BDNP	8,783	0.8	1
	BBDP	8,474	0.8	1
	NLFP	3,984	0.0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>442,963</b>	100%	119

Like all opposition parties in developing countries, the BNP is confronted with enormous challenges that have transformed it from a mighty party to a minority party that is seemingly approaching its inevitable death. Furthermore, the party percentage vote declined from 22.4 percent in 2002 to an all time low of 2.5 percent. In terms of representation in parliament, in 2002, the party had 21 members of parliament drawn from the proportional list. Three (3) Members of Parliament (MPs) from the proportional representation list now represented the party in parliament after the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2007 elections. That is out of 120-

member parliament,<sup>3</sup> the party that ruled Lesotho for 20 years after independence is now represented by 3 MPs and has become a minority party. This means that the party could not even win the single constituency. What is clear is that the BNP appears to be carrying a lot of baggage (The 1970 atrocities) since it refused to conceit defeat in 1970. Similarly, the party has refused to acknowledge defeat openly and refused to participate in by-elections. It is clear that the voters have heard enough about the BNP and they would like to move forward.

This drastic decline reflects the fact that BNP is fading away from Lesotho political map. This also means that the party has past its electable stage and therefore appears to be unable to occupy its former status. Alternatively, the BNP should as well acknowledge this problem and close shop. The New National party (NNP) in South Africa did the same when confronted with similar situation like that of the BNP, more especially the baggage factor that appears to have bedevilled the BNP.

The major challenge that the BNP had faced on its way to power appears to be its current leader Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya. It is clear from the above discussion that he has become a major stumbling block in making the BNP electable. His leadership appears not wooing voters instead driving them away. With new leadership untainted with the 1986 military coup, the chances are that BNP may be electable again.

The party must analyse the environment properly and take stock of current political developments in order to come up with a new political programme under the new leadership. This is important to have in order to enable the party to carryout its political functions effectively and efficiently.

It would appear that the BNP unity in the past was held together by Jonathan's aura and charismatic leadership. Since his death in 1986, and the dawn of democratisation in 1993, this experience has receded from the public consciousness. The reasons to invoke him have lost their resonance. This

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<sup>3</sup> Lesotho Parliament is composted of 120 members who are elected under the Mixed Member proportional Representation. 80 of these MPs are elected under First Past the Post system while the other 40 are drawn from the Proportional Representation list system.

means that the BNP have to explore democratic means rather than authoritarian tendencies of the 70s in order to venture into these new political realities where democracy is supreme.

### **Conclusions**

The paper sets itself the task to analyse the decline of BNP from Lesotho political landscape and what factors contributed to these challenges, which made the party perform dismally in 2007 elections. Judging from these challenges, the BNP stands to lose yet again the coming elections. The party is simply not ready to win even a single constituency under its current leadership. A party that has credibility, political programmes and outstanding performance during its period in opposition wins elections. All these crucial yardsticks remain absent within the BNP. Most damaging of all, has been its seemingly visionless leadership. It has been this leadership, which has increasingly limited the party, chances to win the next election.

Party factionalism has been the end result of lack of visionary leadership and party weaknesses. The lack of intra-party democracy also adds another challenge for the party electoral chances. Instead the BNP has been bogged down with its internal fights to the detriment of building party credibility towards winning the next elections. The party has been unable to confront the ruling party in by-election or any where within the formal polity of Lesotho. This reflects that the party is far from winning the next elections, not unless it adopts a radical strategy to make it electable again.

The BNP statistic says a lot. From 2002 to 2007 elections, these numbers reflect a dying party that must abandon ship with other more electable parties. It can be concluded from the aforesaid that indeed the party which was once a giant and a champion of Lesotho politics has run its course and appears to have reached its ultimate end.

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