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# Sustainable livelihood and poverty eradication in Botswana

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## Abstract

Poverty has been stubborn to be won in Botswana (Maundeni and Mupedziswa, 2007). Literature indicates that, at independence in 1966, Botswana was the 2<sup>nd</sup> poorest country after Bangladesh (Mangobeyi and Odhiambo, 2017). In 1974 with the discovery of diamonds the country moved steadily from the state of poverty to upper middle-income country. This economic development does not really translate in improved livelihoods of people (The World Bank, 2018). Poverty has continued to be pervasive and the unemployment numbers are not changing especially among the youth. This paper therefore looks at some of the poverty eradication measures in Botswana. The paper pays attention to ipelegeng project and assesses its sustainability and whether it will improve the livelihoods of the poor.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; Poverty Eradication; Ipelegeng

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## 1. Introduction

Botswana has maintained one of the world's highest economic growth rates since independence in 1966 (The World Bank, 2018; The World Bank, 2013; Siphambe, 2007; and UNICEF, 2012). The above scholars continue to indicate that, economic growth between 1966 and 2008 was 8.7 percent. The World Bank social protection assessment report (2013) indicates that, Botswana has maintained a fiscal discipline and sound management, Botswana has transformed itself from one of the poorest countries in the world with per capita GDP of US\$ 70 at independence to an upper-middle-income country with a per capita GDP of US\$ 8,533 in 2011 (The World Bank, 2013 and UNICEF, 2012). The report (2013) continue to elucidate that, the growth rate has reduced extreme poverty—the share of population living below one dollar a day—from 23.4 percent in 2003 to 6.4 percent in 2009/2010. The World Bank Report (2013) and Sekwati (2009) indicate that, Botswana's heavy reliance on a single export (diamonds) was a critical factor in its 8 percent decline in real GDP in 2009 (The World Bank 2013 and Sekwati, 2009).

With high performing economy, the question, is whether the general populace is benefiting from the economy. Is there sustainable livelihood among the population or is there a trickledown effect to the ordinary Batswana. Krantz (2001), defines the concept of Sustainable Livelihood (SL) as an attempt to go beyond the conventional definitions and approaches to poverty eradication. These had been found to be too narrow because they focused only on certain aspects or manifestations of poverty, such as low income, or did not consider other vital aspects of poverty such as vulnerability and social exclusion. It is now recognized that more attention must be paid to the various factors and processes which either constrain or enhance poor people's ability to make living in an economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable manner. The SL concept offers a more coherent and integrated approach to poverty (Krantz, 2001).

Botswana according to the national statistics has a population of around 2 098 018 which has shown an increased by at least 10 percent from the 2001 census (Statistics Botswana, 2011).

This paper seeks to look at the mechanisms put in place by Botswana government in terms of reducing extreme poverty. In this presentation poverty will be defined as, deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely lowness of income (Sen, 1997). Poverty viewed in terms of capability deprivation, encompasses not only material deprivation but also other forms of deprivations in many aspects of life such as unemployment, ill-health, lack of education, vulnerability, powerlessness, social exclusion and so on (BIDPA, 2005). Furthermore, the paper seeks to understand whether those poverty eradication measures that are put in place are sustainable and can they improve people's lives.

### 1.1. Background

Botswana was classified as one of the ten poor countries at the time of independence in 1966 and currently it is classified as an upper middle-income country. Botswana's impressive socio-economic development has resulted in the above classification. Good governance and policies continue to hold Botswana in good stead. Over the decades diamond revenue has been strategically invested in human development and infrastructure (UNICEF, 2012). The UNICEF annual report (2012), indicate that Botswana as compared to many countries in the region has one of the best social protection mechanisms in Africa, providing protection to vulnerable

populations. The same sentiments are shared by Kalusopa and Letsie (2013) who elucidate that, the social protection is premised on the five national principles of democracy, self-reliance, development and Botho (Humane) However, despite being an upper middle-income country, Botswana continues to face many development challenges.

These challenges include among others pervasive poverty, unemployment, HIV and AIDS and inequality. Poverty profiles indicate that rural households are more likely to be poorer than urban village households; according to BIDPA (2005) headcount indices for rural areas, urban areas stood at 44.2 and 10.8 percent in 2002-3 respectively. BIDPA (2005) continue to indicate that the elderly and children are more likely to be poor than other age cohorts. Moreover, female headed households are more likely to be poor more than their male counterparts. Education plays a significant role in reducing poverty; the more educated the head of household, the more likely is the household to escape poverty.

Inequality is very high, with a per capita consumption Gini of 0.49 in 2009/10. Despite the relatively high average income per capita, high inequality explains why in 2009/2010, 19.3 percent of the population are poor, and 16 percent of the population have consumption below the food component of the Poverty Datum line (referred in this report as absolute poverty). In monetary terms, the absolute (food) poverty line was P170 per capita per month (about US\$20) and the total poverty line was P220 per capita per month (about US\$26). Many children suffer from malnutrition and 31.4 percent of children under the age of five exhibit stunted growth (Kalusopa and Letsile, 2013).

Maundeni and Mupedziswa (2017) refer to the UNDP (2006) and Konopo (2006) in trying to explain the wealth distribution in Botswana. They indicate that in terms of wealth redistribution, as at 2006, the poorest 20% of the population survived on 4% of the national income, while the richest 20% earned almost 60% of the total income. Focusing on national unemployment, as at 2010, the figure stood at 17.6% (UNDP, 2011). These figures compare favorably when looked at in the context of the situation in the SADC region, the figure remains unacceptably high (Maundeni and Mupedziswa, 2017). Available data show that, across the country, those most affected by poverty have included female-headed households, older people, children and the youth (Maundeni and Mupedziswa, 2017). Moreover, the most affected citizens are those based in rural and remote areas. The high incidence of rural poverty, the high unemployment rate and high degree of inequality have had the effect of exposing the population, especially the rural-based citizens, to numerous vulnerabilities. The UNICEF annual report of 2012 indicates that, many children are not in school, or are behind their expected grade level. Formal labor market opportunities are very limited, and a large share of adults' work in low productivity—low wage jobs (e.g. in agriculture) or are unemployed.

## **2. Poverty eradication initiatives in Botswana**

Maipose (2009) indicates that, despite Botswana's macroeconomic success, the country has a serious problem of poverty compared to countries of similar economic stature. The above author continues to content that, in Botswana, poverty is fundamentally a structural problem. The above sentiments were also shared by the reviewers of the Millennium Development Goals in 2004 (MDGR, 2004), who said, It is a consequence of a

narrow economic base, which limits opportunities for gainful employment; a poor endowment of agro resources; small and sparsely distributed population 2 million in 2011, and as a result of the population size, distribution, small and fragmented internal market (MDGR, 2004).

Government provides a wide range of services for families and children as social protection (Kalusopa and Letsie, 2013). These services are aimed at reducing poverty as well as provide social safety net for individuals, groups and families and are usually part of the annual budget (Kalusopa and Letsie, 2013). In 2011 Botswana took a bold step to shift from poverty reduction to poverty eradication (Poverty eradication guideline, 2013). This has prompted government to come up with poverty eradication programmes which are aimed at improving the livelihoods of Botswana by addressing all aspects of poverty including among others, policy environment, the institutional framework and the establishment of sustainable economic empowerment projects. The poverty eradication initiatives include among others, (1) Ipelegeng, (2) Backyard gardens, (3) alternative packages. This paper will concentrate on Ipelegeng because it is the one which has more people than any other program.

## 2.1. Ipelegeng

In 2008, the labour based programme was finally instituted as a permanent continuous labour intensive public works programme to provide relief in the form of supplementary income to the poor and unemployed in both rural and urban areas (Selolwane, 2012). The programme according to Selolwane (2012) reached 172 360 beneficiaries with a total of P289.7 million in financial year 2008/9 and went up to P368.5 million in the following year. The programme is called Ipelegeng which translates into self-reliance. It is a labour intensity program that was first established in 1960 as an emergency response to alleviate effects of severe drought. Kalusopa and Letsie (2013) indicate that in the 1960's and 1970's participants of the drought programme as it was known were paid with food. It was called 'food for work' its mandate by then was to cushion the effects of drought. Furthermore, the mandate is to help people to reconstruct their lives and help in the development. In his state of the national address, the president of the Republic of Botswana indicated that in 2013, Ipelegeng was allocated P530 Million (\$66.25 million) for about 289 595 beneficiaries, which had 212 079 females and 77 516 males. The numbers show that there is high number of females as compared to males as it was indicated in the background that poverty is more into the females as compared to their male counterparts. This programme was revived following an evaluation of the destitute policy and the recommendation to remove all able-bodied adults who had sought income refuge in the destitute programme (Selolwane, 2012). What remains to be seen is the sustainability of this massive injection of funds and whether it will continue to be used along the usual relief line or sustained employment creation and skill building to increase the buying power of the poor and enable them to contribute to economic growth and sustainable livelihood.

### 2.1.1. IPELEGENG PROGRAMME

#### 2.1.2. Service description

Ipelegeng is a Government Initiative or programme whose main objective is to provide short term employment support and relief whilst at the same time carrying out essential development projects that have been

identified and prioritized through the normal development planning process (Poverty Eradication Guidelines, 2013).

- Targets unskilled and semi-skilled labour for short term assistance due to other economic factors using simple tools and machinery.
- Focuses on maintenance of public facilities
- Is targeted mainly at being a source of supplementary income and employment to, but not limited to, vulnerable members of the community.
- Shifted its focus from drought relief to poverty alleviation in 2008.
- Currently the programme targets at engaging a total of 50,000 beneficiaries per month<sup>1</sup>.

The Ministry coordinates programme implementation at the national level through the department of local government development plan while implementation of the programme is done by all Local Authorities in both rural and urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

#### *2.1.3. Projects Eligible to Be Undertaken Through Ipelegeng*

- Maintenance of drift fences, primary and secondary school facilities, health facilities, staff houses and government facilities<sup>3</sup>.
- Desalting of dams and storm water drains.
- Vegetation control (Bush clearing and grass cutting in public spaces and along public roads).

#### *2.1.4. Implementation Procedure or Process*

- Projects are initiated by the communities through the assistance of the Local Authorities
- Approval of implementation is given by the Ministry funds permitting.
- Project implementation is supervised by the Local Authorities through Programme Coordinators

#### *2.1.5. Eligibility for Engagement on the Programme as a Beneficiary*

- Any citizen aged 18 years and above may apply for and get a chance to be engaged in the programme.
- Must have a valid Omang /Identity
- Recruitment is done by the Village or Ward Development Committees (V/WDCs) at the village Kgotla.

#### *2.1.6. Type of Benefits*

- Current wage rates are P400 (\$40) per month for casual labourers and P534 (\$53) per month for supervisors.

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<sup>1</sup> Poverty eradication guideline

<sup>2</sup> Adopted from the Republic of Botswana website.

<sup>3</sup> The above has been adopted from the Poverty Eradication Guidelines.

- Employment is for a period of 20 days, working six hours a day. Employment is not on permanent basis. All beneficiaries must apply monthly and are engaged on rotational basis with preference given to those who were not engaged previously thereby spreading the opportunities and benefits<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.1.7. Challenges of poverty eradication initiatives

There are some common challenges that has been adopted in this paper from the experience of the author as a social worker dealing with poverty eradication and also the ones identified by the review of the programme by the government of Botswana and UNICEF (2012).

- No legal framework, presidential directives.
- Employ youth instead of investing on education.
- Project is not sustainable (used P530 Million \$66.25 million for about 289 595 beneficiaries).
- The benefits are not commensurate with the standard of life and below low-income wage.
- Poverty is rife among the children and elderly, but the programs are design more to fit the youth.
- There is no skill transfer to the beneficiaries.

## 3. Recommendations

- Emphasis should be in education/training
- Projects must be geared towards creating more income to sustain it.
- Creation of more employment
- Involve experts in creating programs and policies that affects social life of people.
- Re-locate the Ipelegeng function to the Department of Community Development at district level. This will enable the Programme to be properly staffed with permanent staff that will provide institutional memory, capacity building in both programme planning, design and execution. This will also make it possible to establish a Monitoring and Evaluation function in the programme (Republic of Botswana and UNICEF, 2012).
- Ipelegeng public program should focus on the poor adult without employment opportunities. Currently according to the World Bank Report (2013), the program achieves modest targeting results due to poor regional allocation of its funding by offering relatively high wage rate which makes the program attractive to the non-poor who are taking the place of the poor in the program. They should be some reforms to improve the targeting and effectiveness of the program. The high demand of the ipelegeng program has forced the administrators to ration the access demand by rationing through lottery system.

## 4. Conclusion

Despite its macroeconomic success, Botswana has a serious problem of poverty compared to countries of similar economic stature. There should be paradigm shift from the policy formulators, implementers and

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from the Poverty Eradication Guideline

beneficiaries. People centered development (involve professionals with skills in drawing up programmes). It is very likely that these programs benefit mostly the non-poor. The effectiveness of the nutrition program is in doubt, given the high and persistent level of malnutrition. The current system relies too heavily on in-kind distribution of food (e.g. school feeding programs, Vulnerable Groups Feeding Program), which require that a large share of their budget is spent on administration and logistics. In addition, the safety net covers only a small fraction of the absolutely poor because of its reliance on programs targeted at individuals, not families, and lack of a last resort family- focused anti-poverty program.

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