

The State of Poverty in Botswana: An Analysis of Poverty Alleviation Policies and Strategies

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Abstract: Prior to gaining independence in 1966, Botswana was one of the poorest countries in the world and is today one of the fastest growing economies globally. The country is renowned for its mineral led economy producing primarily high value diamonds. Its diverse landscape and unique wildlife earned the country international recognition and thus is now, a prime tourist destination. Notwithstanding, there is still an enormous degree of economic disparity in Botswana's population. In the year 2020, the country's Gini-coefficient was at 53.3 placing it among the top 10 countries with the most unequal distributions of wealth. Like most countries in Africa, Botswana implements anti-poverty policies and strategies however the implementation and outcomes of the same requires evaluation. In this regard, this paper explores the efficiency of Botswana's anti-poverty policies and strategies linking the same to job creation. The study applies chiefly Bradshaw's theories of poverty to analyze the state of poverty in Botswana. The methodology adopted includes a qualitative approach and a case study strategy with Botswana as a unit of analysis. The underlying philosophy for this paper is phenomenology. Findings indicate that Botswana's poverty alleviation policies and strategies have contributed to reduce the level of poverty from independence to date. Nevertheless, in the effort to reduce poverty, these policies and strategies continue to face challenges that negatively affect the effective implementation of the policies and strategies. To this end, this paper discusses the extent to which these policies and strategies have been effective in alleviating poverty in Botswana amidst the ever pertinent question of unemployment.

Keywords: Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Economic Growth, Policies, Strategies

1. Introduction

The subject of poverty remains a major issue at both national and international scale discussions, predominantly among the developing countries (Balogun, 1999:11-16). To date, African countries still face high levels of poverty and this demands increased government initiative and commitment (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:2). The problem of poverty and how to reduce it remains the most pressing dilemma in the international development debate (Handley, Higgins, Sharma, Bird & Cammack, 2009:iv). In terms of meaning, defining poverty has always been a daunting task as it is a complex phenomenon. Often times, a definition of the concept is reliant on the context in which it is applied to. To Baratz & Grigsby (1971:120), poverty refers to "a severe lack of physical and mental well-being, closely associated with inadequate economic resources and consumption". For George, (1988:208), the term refers to the need and lack of basic and vital necessities that often change with time and place. The United Nations (1998:1) conceived a broader definition of poverty defining it as

the 'denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity'.

Alleviating poverty is one of the means of eradicating poverty and establishing ideal sustainable livelihoods. (Mubangizi, 2009:446). These means must be integrated in any country's economic development and growth initiatives. The process of economic growth alongside a positive change in the level of production of goods and services, is a delicate phenomenon. A number of factors and their interaction with each other play a role in shaping this process. Conventional economies suggest that factors of production such as labour, capital and land are the main determinants of growth. It is critically important for public service delivery system to be set up in a way that is effective to hold together and pursuit of sustainable livelihoods (United Nations, 1998:1). Such a service will enable most of the poverty alleviation programmes to be effectively and efficiently delivered to the people. The existence and enhancement of economic growth is a pivotal instrument in reducing the rate of poverty and an effective

measure of taking out people living in abject poverty through the means of productive employment (Singh & Chudasama, 2020:2).

Countries across the globe face challenges posed by poverty and Botswana is no exception. In terms of its development trajectory, Botswana emerged from colonisation in September 1966 as one of the poorest countries in the world. Immediately after independence, the country was dependent on food aid with its budget supported by its coloniser, Britain. The situation was not helped by recurrent droughts, particularly, the effects of the 1965 drought were felt for some years after independence. The foregoing meant that a majority of the population was condemned to poverty. Botswana's economic fortunes changed with the discovery of diamonds in the late 1960s (Molokwane, 2019:51) with the first find in 1967 in Orapa. This was followed by other finds. Diamonds were exploited to finance economic, human and social development. As a result, Botswana was able to have developmental successes. To illustrate, between 1990 and 2017, its Human Development Index (HDI) value increased from 0.581 to 0.717, an increase of 23.3 percent (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Botswana's HDI value for 2017 was 0.717, which put the country in the high human development category positioning it at 101 out of 189 countries and territories.

In the same vein, the HDI of Sub-Saharan Africa as a region increased from 0.398 in 1990 to 0.537 by 2018, thus, placing Botswana above the regional average (*ibid*). It is also important to appreciate that the country also enjoyed relative peace and political stability since independence in 1966 holding, free and fair elections characterised by the smooth handing over of power from one presidency to another. Despite very impressive HDI scores, challenges such as poverty, proceed to pose a challenge to the government of the day. The failure to create adequate jobs and reduce the unemployment rate considerably continues to be a challenge in Botswana. One noticeable concern that continues to be discernible is youth unemployment. Employment in Botswana has shown little responsiveness to change in economic activity. Lack of skills in the labour force and skills mismatches have been among the most serious challenges, compounded by an overly restrictive policy on permits for foreign workers and high wages in the public sector, (Statistics Botswana, 2017). Ultimately, the government is faced with a need

to revamp its anti-poverty policies, programmes and strategies as well as employment creation strategies.

2. Theories of Poverty

Literature on poverty uniformly acknowledges different theories of poverty, but the literature has classified these theories in multiple ways (compare for instance: Blank, 2003; Goldsmith & Blakely, 1992; Jennings & Kushnick, 1999; Rodgers, 2000; Shaw, 1996). Virtually all authors distinguish between theories that root the cause of poverty in individual deficiencies (conservative) and theories that lay the cause on broader social phenomena (liberal or progressive) (Bradshaw, 2007:11). Notwithstanding, theories of poverty attribute the origin and state of poverty to various factors. Some theorise that poverty is instigated by a person in their individuality, others believe that poverty is a function of 'Economic, Political and Social Distortions or Discrimination' while others attribute it to deficiencies present in communities. Analysis of anti-poverty theories by Bradshaw's for instance, provides an argument of a theory entitled 'poverty caused by individual deficiencies'. This theory espouses the notion that individuals are responsible for their poverty situation but this is primarily contributed by lack of resources, assets or means they can utilise to access a good standard of living. This theory is a type that many Classical and neoclassical theories of poverty advanced by scholars over the years.

Supporting this argument is a claim by Brady (2018:6) citing the behavioural theory that explains that the less privileged or the poor engage in actions and make decisions increasing their poverty like poor work morale or single parenting. In the aforementioned analyses, the individual is either not endowed with the appropriate skills, attitude, tenacity, technology to face the problems of life or is simply indulged in demeanour that undermines productivity (Bradshaw, 2007:6). This as such, explains the fact that despite the existence and implementation of anti-poverty these policies, people do not have the pertinent experience, skills, and knowledge and motivation, they will be unable to utilise these set policies to take themselves out of poverty. Further to this analysis, Bradshaw (2007:10) ushers in the theory that poverty is caused by 'Economic, Political and Social Distortions or Discrimination'. This theory belongs to a family of 'Social exclusion and social capital theories' (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015).

This theory explains the fundamental truth that anti-poverty policies face the threat of not being effective in alleviating poverty. Poor and insufficient economic, political, and social systems as such, have resulted in people to have inadequate opportunities and resources that would otherwise have enabled them to achieve a better standard of living (Bradshaw, 2007:10). Sameti, Esfhani & Haghghi (2012:48) share the same view as they elucidate that poverty comes as a result of larger economic and social structures and capitalism also contributes as the cause of poverty. An economy may be set up in such a way that it does not favour and side-lines the poor regardless of their abilities and competencies. In addition, the poor are left out in political discussions and at many economic levels, they are side-lined but rather, the rich and those possessing power are privileged to partake in discussions that affect the country's economic development. In this regard, Bradshaw (2007:10) places the blame for the existence of poverty poor leadership in the structures expected to reduce poverty. This line of thought is elaborated further in the Marxian/radical theories of poverty (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015).

Another anti-poverty theory analysed is that of 'Poverty caused by Cumulative and Cyclical Interdependencies'. The Cumulative and Cyclical Interdependence theory of poverty comes as a result of the continuous and gradually widening problems of poverty for individuals which are mutually and linked to the deficiencies present in communities. (Bradshaw, 2007:11). A lack of a viable educational background, eventually aggravates the effects of poor health, communication and other amenities or necessities leads to a downward spiral poverty. "Inadequate education and poor-quality health cycles back, trapping impoverished households in low income." (Pohan, 2013:7). Therefore, a cycle forms because a sustainable livelihood is mostly dependant on factors like good educational background as education allows one to acquire relevant skills and knowledge which are essential to qualify one for the labour market. This asserts the findings derived by Awan, Malik, Sarwar, & Waqas (2011:1) that if one has the highest level of education, they have a higher chance to a better life.

The Cyclical theory of poverty observes that individuals' situations and community resources are interconnected. (Korankye, 2019:59). Henceforth, if

there is a lack in one area, it will ultimately affect the other one. Hortensia (2008:23) also observes that the cumulative and interdependent theory of poverty presents itself like a chain that is difficult and complex to break because one occurrence leads to the other. Thus, the names, 'cycle', 'cumulative' and 'interdependent'. The occurrences are recurrent. "It goes round, and round and the poor can hardly find themselves out." (Hortensia, 2008:23). Another theory of poverty is that of "Poverty caused by geographical disparities" (Bradshaw, 2007:17). This regional theory calls the attention to the fact that people, institutions, and cultures in certain geographic areas lack the objective resources needed to generate well-being and income and that they lack the power to claim redistribution (Bradshaw, 2007:18; Tian, Wang, Zhao, Jiang & Guo, 2018). Korankye, (2019:58) explains poverty in terms of geographical disparities as one of the causes that lead to so-called geographical poverty.

Khan (2000:3) highlights that there is a high number of poor people in rural areas within developing countries and the level of poverty is severe compared to the urban areas. The geographical location influences the rate of poverty because most people residing in urban areas tend to have better access to essential resources and means to earn a standard of living. Residents in rural areas do not have access to such resources or enough means to eliminate their chances of being poor (Khan, 2000:3; Bird, 2019). The effects of the geographical disparities negatively affect the poor in the rural areas because without the necessary means, the rural dwellers are left with no choice but to depend on the government for almost everything which eventually births the case of the dependency syndrome on the people. Thus, geographical disparities threaten the effectiveness of the Community Based Strategy for Rural Development. Whilst there is a wide range of theories of poverty, it is critical to note that in our analysis of poverty applying any of the theories, each approach has an important contribution to make to our understanding of poverty, but no theory is sufficient in itself (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015).

3. Botswana's Anti-Poverty Policies

3.1 The Citizen Economic Empowerment Policy

The Citizen Economic Empowerment (CEE) Policy was formulated as an effort to among others:

empower citizens, inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship and reduce the levels of poverty in the country. This was for the primary purpose of the need to realize the significance and vital role of economic development so that the distribution of wealth and income can be equal as an effective tactic to improve the lives of Botswana. (Republic of Botswana, 2012:1). A concrete definition of Citizen Economic Empowerment highlights the necessary engagements that are inter-connected and focused at strengthening the capacity of citizens to use their resources sustainably effectively and efficiently for the purpose of making further income and wealth within a dynamic economy (Republic of Botswana, 2012:3). Under this policy, several initiatives came into existence. These include: the Localisation policy and the Economic Diversification Drive (EDD); Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA). These established programmes and policies are designed to support and foster economic growth and citizen empowerment (Republic of Botswana, 2012:1). According to Lekgowe (2016:138), the CEE Policy has over the years failed to deliver its promises as stipulated in its mandate, goals, and objectives.

3.2 The National Youth Policy

The lack of access to economic resources amongst the youth in Botswana led to the formulation of the National Youth Policy in 1996. These economic resources were essential for the goal of empowerment and exploration of potential employment opportunities (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:4). Some of the programmes established under this policy are Young Farmers' Fund, Youth Development Fund, and E-innovation Youth Empowerment Programme as well as the Arts and Culture Grant. Furthermore, the objective of this policy is to ensure that every youth in Botswana is awarded an equal opportunity to develop and improve their lives in the best way possible. (Republic of Botswana, 2010:1). The National Youth Policy as such encourages participation of youth in the economic development of Botswana which would eventually strengthen sustainable livelihoods.

This policy comprises twelve strategic areas that include among others, youth, poverty, and hunger. The objective was to establish a framework that will be towards reducing poverty amongst the youth in Botswana especially the vulnerable youth groups (Republic of Botswana, 2010:16). By introducing National Youth Policy, the Government of Botswana

envisioned that the effective implementation of the same would cultivate, strengthen, and foster youth participation and equip youth with pertinent skills to utilise in improving their standard of living, a step forward towards the quest of alleviating poverty in Botswana. In Nthomang & Diraditsile's (2016:50) view, this policy has been quite successful in providing funding for the youth economic empowerment programmes that were introduced. Ostensibly Botswana is still struggling with high rates of youth unemployment which raises the question about the effectiveness of the National Youth Policy. Gaetsewe, (2019:1) observes that high youth unemployment in Botswana is a result of the labour force lacking relevant skills that match with the job market and lack of work experience.

3.3 The National Policy on Education

According to UNESCO (2006:1) in 1977, the first National Policy on Education was introduced which was focused on '*Education for Kagisano*' for purposes for social harmony. To reconcile education with economic needs in Botswana, the government revised the National Youth Policy on Education in 1994 (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:5). The primary objective of the Ministry of Education was to enhance and upgrade the level and quality of education in Botswana. (UNESCO, 2006:1). Nevertheless, the quality of education in Botswana is not up to the highest standard (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:10). The unimpressive education quality in Botswana has thus negatively affected entrepreneurship, technical and managerial skills that are essential for economic development which result in fewer employment opportunities leading to lower incomes or poverty (*ibid*).

The Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, (2007:10) emphasises that despite Botswana's success in providing education to its citizens; there are prevailing and significant inequalities within Botswana's education system. To illustrate, there are students who struggle to complete their first ten years of basic education. Though considerable progress has been made in this area, Botswana is still faced with the challenge of availing education fully, to children in the rural areas as well as those with disabilities and other vulnerable groups (*ibid*). In the end, this has brought forward the question of whether Botswana's education system is an effective contributor in driving the nation to economic development and sustainable livelihood.

4. Botswana's Anti-Poverty Strategies

4.1 National Strategy for Poverty Reduction (NSPR)

Poverty reduction strategies are highly significant in harmonizing bilateral and multi-lateral development cooperation for every country (Tannerfeldt & Ljung, 2006:1). These are detailed plans towards the objective of reducing poverty especially for poor countries seeking debt relief. In Botswana, the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction was established in 2003. The strategy was implemented for anti-poverty initiatives in Botswana to be run consistently and productively (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:3). Further to this, several ways were determined that could assist in reducing the rate of poverty through the implementation of this strategy and some of them include improving human capacity by availing access to quality education, health, and nutrition. (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:3). The Poverty Reduction Strategy came about as a result of the need to develop poverty reduction strategy programmes that were more inclined towards the ideals of Vision 2016 that follows specifically the pillar of a "*prosperous, productive, and innovative nation*" (Siphambe, 2007:25).

In addition, the government of Botswana had noticed that the rate of poverty continued to rise at a fast rate and still there were no effective anti-poverty strategies that could deal with the problems. Nevertheless, the extent to which the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction (NSPR) has been coupled with several challenges that to a certain degree they have significantly acted as prevailing barriers for the strategy to be fully successful to its high potential. According to Magombeyi & Odhiambo, (2017:10) the quality of education in Botswana is not up to the highest and quality standard. Therefore, the unimpressive education quality in Botswana has negatively affected entrepreneurship, technical and managerial skills that are essential for economic development which alternatively triggers less employment opportunities that result in low income for citizens which push them to poverty.

Furthermore, Botswana's reliance on diamonds as the primary and most important wealth creating industry affects the economy in a number of ways. While Botswana in its early years of independence has managed to create an impressive infrastructure

and urban growth from the proceeds of the diamond trade, it has also created an over-reliance on Government involvement in the economy and hence stifled entrepreneurial spirit, which, in turn, led to the high rates of unemployment. Republic of Botswana (2013:6) also asserts that over reliance on the mining sector by Botswana leaves the country excessively vulnerable to economic shocks. Thus, it is important for Botswana's economy to diversify.

4.2 The Community Based Strategy for Rural Development

Rural areas in Botswana are continuously showing higher rates of poverty than cities or industrial centres. Thus, developing the rural areas in Botswana has been one of the primary objective policy and strategy to enhance the wellbeing and living conditions since independence by the government (Moepeng, 2013:2). The Community Based Strategy for Rural Development was an initiative established with the central goal of encouraging participation from communities with the objective to develop and provide a sustainable livelihood (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:4). Magombeyi & Odhiambo, (2017:4) cited in UNDP, (2005) explain that the aim of the established initiative was to encourage communities to initiate relevant activities using local leadership structures; the District Development Committee and Community Based Organization were responsible for the implementation of these activities.

The Government of Botswana introduced programmes with the main focus on creating employment and increase productivity in the rural areas (Siphambe, 2007:26). The programmes include Labour Based Public Works Programme, Labour Intensive Public Works Programme, and Accelerated rain-fed Arable Programme (ARA). Although the established programmes have been analysed and their findings showing that they have significantly reduced poverty in the rural areas, the programmes were not free from critique as having created the spirit of the dependency syndrome in Botswana. (Siphambe, 2007:26).

4.3 Provision of Social Safety Nets

The provision of Social Safety Nets Strategy was implemented by the government of Botswana as the second broad category of poverty alleviation

(Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2017:5). Seleka; Siphambe; Ntseane; Mbere; Kerapeletswe & Sharp (2007:1) indicated that social safety nets are important in reducing poverty if they are executed effectively. Social safety nets are seen as effective in alleviating abject poverty, diseases, and malnutrition (Seleka, *et al.*, 2007:1). The Independent Evaluation Group, (2011:13) also asserts that the programmes under social safety nets are key in protecting the poor and the vulnerable groups from the negative impact that come with poverty.

The strategy of social safety nets has met several challenges. According to Seleka *et al.* (2007:1) social safety nets do not reach households with people living in severe poverty of which they are the main targeted beneficiaries and there are high costs of transfers to households as a result of corruption and poor programme design. Such reoccurring challenges are explained by the Political-Economic Structure theory of poverty. Bradshaw, (2007:11) stresses that the system itself creates barriers that prevent the less privileged to acquire means for a better life. The fact that these social safety nets do not reach the poor who are initially the intended beneficiaries indicates that the selection criteria marginalizes the poor. The political-economic structure works in such a way that it excludes some group of people from access to means and resources. "Selection criteria directly or indirectly exclude some groups of persons based on inappropriate criteria." (Bradshaw, 2007:11).

5. Methodological Approach

This study is grounded on the qualitative research approach and phenomenology research paradigm. Phenomenology is both a philosophical movement and a family of qualitative research methodologies (Gill, 2020). Understanding epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning research is critical for successfully conducting phenomenological research (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Different ways of interpretation in phenomenology include: pure description of a lived experience; the analysis of some form of an experience and; lastly in interpretation of a kind of experience by relating it to a relevant context (Alase, 2017). Adopting the third way of interpretation, research policies and strategies discussed within this study were analysed and interpreted in relation to the contemporary context of the poverty and job creation situations in Botswana.

6. Poverty Alleviation, Unemployment and Job Creation Linkages in Botswana

Analysis of the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction has gone through various phases in the literature on development. An important premise of the very early theories of development for example, was that the benefits of economic growth would trickle down to the poor. Since then, questions have been raised on the assumption of an automatic link between growth and poverty reduction, and attempts have been made to understand the mechanisms through which the benefits of growth may get transmitted to the poor (Islam, 2004:2). Some of the latter categories of studies do also refer to the role of employment; and yet, a rigorous analysis of the role of employment in the linkage between economic growth and poverty reduction appears to be missing (*ibid*). This analysis and observation remains true to date and Botswana is no exception.

From being one of the world's poorest countries at independence in 1966, Botswana rapidly became one of the world's development success (World Bank, 2021) and has since sustained its rapid economic growth. Despite Botswana having successfully maintained a sturdy economic environment, lack of connection between economic growth and employment building remain a pressing concern. The economic growth has perpetually been accompanied by growing unemployment, graduate unemployment in particular which has therefore become a national concern (Kemiso & Kolawole, 2017:164-164). Case in point, during the collapse of the world economic system in 2008 many countries Botswana included, found it rather challenging to create jobs for their graduates. For instance, according to the Statistics Botswana (2017:9), the national unemployment stood at 17.7% and only 20.8% was attributed those without any kind of training and the rest had some training ranging from apprentice, vocational to university.

The high unemployment rate still exists to date. This state of affairs is linked to issues such as skills development for preparing graduates in the job market are prevailing. The Tertiary Education Policy 2008 has increased the equitable access of education. As observed by (2007:64) & Botlhale (2016) education development is an investment and an effective human capital in any country as it ensures the sustainable socio-economic development. The

tertiary education has increased its enrolment rate from 22 000 in 2006 to 47 000 in 2009. This high increase drastically flooded the labour market with graduates whose competencies and skills are questionable. The unemployed youth offer a mismatch of skills that are needed by the labour market hence a fail to be employed (Mbuya, 2017). According to Mogomotsi & Madigele (2017), the level of unemployment in Botswana indicates that education is not sufficiently preparing the graduates for the practical world of work in terms of skills, professionalism and expectations. The youth lack work experience and require pieces of training, which is costly for the labour workforce to absorb them.

Observations by scholars (see for instance Siphambe, 2007:11-12) are that job creation is concentrated in the urban areas, hence the high urbanisation rate among the youth seeking employment. There are inequalities amongst the geographical location for youth who seek job opportunities. A Statistics Botswana (2017:9) survey provided an estimate of youth (15-35 years) unemployment at 25.2% with the female higher at 26.9% compared to the 23.6% for males. The 2021 Gini Index by the World Population Review ranks Botswana 9th most unequal country in the world with a Gini coefficient of 53.3 (World Population Review, 2020). Notwithstanding there have been efforts to mitigate and the levels of unemployment in the country. The government's efforts in addressing the unemployment rate, as according to Kemiso & Kolawole (2017:157) include implementation of different programmes, policies and strategies, amongst these programmes include the Youth Development Fund, Young Farmers Fund and the National Internship Programme. This means an emphasis on skills empowerment and development is vital and needs to be re-focused to combat the high rate of unemployment and innovative entrepreneurial ideas that would sustain individual, society and a nation as a whole.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study identified and assessed some of the Botswana's anti-poverty policies and strategies. Using Bradshaw review of theories of poverty, the study examined the state of poverty in the country. A further analysis of unemployment and Job Creation Linkages in Botswana was provided in light of the state of poverty in the country. Poverty continues to pose different challenges to Botswana. What remains a key challenge is that despite initiatives

and efforts by government to alleviate poverty and create jobs unemployment rate continue to rise. There is a general unanimity among previous studies done in Botswana (Mogomotsi & Madigele, 2017) that despite the country being referred as an upper middle income country, the challenge of unemployment seems to be one that is elusive in terms of solutions and initiatives as it requires fitting policies and programmes that can be burgeoned by the government and other stakeholders with the assistance of development partners. Graduate unemployment remains an imperative policy issue as such, policy-makers must search for strategies that will ensure that requirements essential to creating employment for graduates and in general are met. These strategies should further accord citizens an up-scaled entry into the labour market. This is imperative since Botswana has a relatively youthful population. This demographic deficit may come across as both an economic threat at any point in time.

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