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# **SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN BOTSWANA SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

GILBERT A. SEKGOMA

## Introduction

This paper aims to achieve three objectives: firstly, to provide an overview of developments in the changing economic fortunes of Botswana during the period under consideration; secondly, to assess the impact of economic growth on various social groups; and thirdly, to suggest measures for reducing poverty (in the lower social groups) in the midst of plenty.

During the last one and a half decades, Botswana experienced one of the highest growth rates in Africa (an average of 11 percent per annum).<sup>(1)</sup> By 1984, per capita income had increased from US\$110 in 1970 to US\$910.<sup>(2)</sup> The country also experienced an increasingly rapid rate of population growth. The growth rate averaged 2.8 percent during the 1970s and 3.4 percent in 1981.<sup>(3)</sup> During this period of economic boom, the government made conscientious efforts within an essentially capitalist framework to advance economic progress through investments in physical infrastructure, expansion of health and educational facilities, and through the creation of a favourable climate for both foreign and local capital investment.<sup>(4)</sup> These measures went a long way towards attracting foreign capital in mining, construction and service industries. This resulted in employment creation and a steady improvement in the standard of living, albeit to different degrees in different parts of the country.

This picture of apparent success in the economic sphere during the post-colonial period contrasts sharply with the period prior to 1966. Before independence, trends in the economy and its future looked very bleak. Prospects for growth in the agricultural sector, especially in food production, were gloomy due to low levels of technological development in subsistence agriculture, relatively poor soils and intermittent occurrences of inclement weather conditions.<sup>(5)</sup> The cattle industry was under severe constraints. The drought of 1962-66 had wiped out almost a third of the national cattle herd.<sup>(6)</sup> These negative trends in the territory's economy were compounded further by the absence of modern manufacturing industries (except for beef) to compensate for losses in agriculture due to the drought.

The country was generally undeveloped in infrastructure. The road network system consisted of gravel and sand roads of a generally poor standard. Only 25Kms out of 1,300kms was bitumen roads.<sup>(7)</sup> The only reliable transportation system in the country was the Rhodesian (Zimbabwe) railway line running from North to South along the eastern part of the country. The poor condition of roads hampered easy communications throughout the territory. In addition, other essential social amenities were in short supply. For instance, only a small fraction of the population had access to fresh piped water. Health care service and educational facilities were in short supply. Moreover, the availability of qualified people to run the economy was an even more daunting problem at the time of independence.

#### An Overview of Developments in the Country

Within a period of six years following independence, positive trends in Botswana's economy began to be felt. By 1972/3, government revenues from local sources had increased from P4.5 million in 1965/6 to P28.1 million.<sup>(8)</sup> As a result of this phenomenal growth of revenues, the country was able to balance its recurrent budget without assistance from Britain.<sup>(9)</sup>

Expansion in recurrent revenues was paralleled by an increase in development expenditure. This grew from P5 million in 1965/6 to P30 million in 1972/3. More than 10 percent of this was mobilized from local resources.<sup>(10)</sup> Domestic output (especially in agriculture) more than quadrupled during this period, and per capita income increased due to a high average growth rate during the latter part of the 1960s and beyond the 1970s (see Table 1).

A number of factors accounted for these positive trends. Firstly, the latter part of the 1960s and early 1970s were blessed with favourable weather conditions.<sup>(11)</sup> As a result, the period experienced rapid increases in both crops and livestock production. The rural economy recovered and the national cattle herd was replenished. The Botswana Meat Commission (BMC) experienced variable performance due to changes in the supply of animals.<sup>(12)</sup> Overall, the agricultural sector was dominant in terms of contribution to G.D.P. until the mid 1970s when it was overtaken by the mining industry (see Table 1).

Secondly, the independence period experienced a phenomenal expansion of the public sector. This was engendered partly by the relocation of the capital from Mafikeng in South Africa to Gaborone in Botswana. Relocation entailed construction of new government buildings, creation of new departments and job opportunities. Critical in these developments was the continued budgetary support by the former colonial power.

Thirdly, the period from 1970 witnessed the discovery of diamonds at Orapa and copper-nickel at Selibe Phikwe. The exploitation of these minerals generated phenomenal economic growth in the history of the young democratic state.<sup>(13)</sup> This development expanded the G.D.P. by more than half, and value added from construction increased by ten fold. The mining sector overtook agriculture (livestock production) in G.D.P. contribution(see Table 1).

Table 1: G.D.P. by Sectors Current Prices,  
(million Pula, Percentages), 1965-1974

	1965/6	1966/7	1967/8	1968/9	1971/2	1973/4	1974/5
1. Agriculture	11.1	14.5	18.3	23.2	34.2	69.2	61.2
2. Mining	0.2	0.0	0.7	0.2	11.2	15.9	15.2
3. Manufacturing	3.8	2.9	3.6	2.8	5.1	10.1	15.5
4. Water & Elec- tricity	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	1.3	3.3	6.9
5. Construction	2.1	2.1	2.0	1.9	10.0	21.2	20.3
6. Trade	6.2	6.8	5.0	5.1	17.5	35.1	43.0
7. Transport	2.7	3.0	2.4	3.4	3.8	5.3	5.5
8. Financial Serv.	2.1	2.4	2.9	3.5	5.3	13.2	14.2
9. Social & Personal Services			1.0	1.3	3.5	6.8	8.8
10. General Govt.	4.5	4.9	7.7	9.5	11.9	18.2	24.9
11. GDP at current market prices	32.9	36.9	43.9	51.9	103.8	197.5	213.1
12. Percentage growth rate		12	19	17	20.4	23.0	29.6

Table 1 (continued) GDP by Sectors Current Prices,  
(million Pula, Percentages), 1975-1982

	1975/6	1976/7	1977/8	1978/9	1979/80	1981/82	1982
1. Agriculture	64.2	70.8	15.5	10.9	10.6	12.4	7.4
2. Mining	33.9	43.3	23.2	31.5	27.1	17.5	28.2
3. Manufacturing	20.9	21.0	8.5	4.2	6.4	7.4	8.2
4. Water & Elec- tricity	11.1	10.9	2.4	2.2	3.5	4.1	3.0
5. Construction	20.3	17.5	4.2	5.2	4.9	5.0	4.3
6. Trade	53.9	57.9	20.2	22.8	22.7	25.5	22.4
7. Transport	7.6	1.7	2.6	2.0	2.2	2.3	3.0
8. Financial Serv.	17.8	23.4	5.8	6.2	4.5	5.2	5.3
9. Social and Personal serv.	13.1	12.1	3.6	3.1	3.5	3.9	3.8
10. General govt.	36.1	47.3	13.9	11.9	14.4	16.1	14.5
11. GIP at current market prices	176.2	299.2	504	689	771	855	1043
	8.3	34.2	42	37	12	11	22

Source: Colclough and Macarthy (1980) p.58; Statistical Bulletin, Vol.4, No.4 (December, 1979) p.35; World Bank (1985) p.101.

The impact of mineral exploitation was felt in the country's external trade (see Table 2). Since the mid 1970s minerals (diamonds in particular) have dominated export earnings.<sup>(14)</sup> This development resulted in increased revenue, from P1.0 million (from manganese and asbestos) in 1968 to P15.2 million in 1975<sup>(15)</sup>, P99.4 million in 1982 and over P300 million in 1985 as indicated in Table 3. These increased inflows of revenue from the mining sector, together with increased inflows of revenue from the Customs Union (particularly after the 1969 renegotiation of revenue sharing),<sup>(16)</sup> and inflows of external aid (including grants-in-aid) enabled government to undertake infrastructure development on a wide scale. Population centres became linked by all weather roads, and the main trunk road from the southern part of the country to the Zambian border was constructed. These activities generated employment opportunities for locals at the rate of 10 percent per annum during the 1970s.<sup>(17)</sup>

Fourthly, the country experienced surpluses<sup>(18)</sup> in the balance of payments (see Table 4) and had a small debt service obligation. Moreover, much of the economic success in the country was due to an efficient civil service, which played an effective role in the choice of projects and saw to their full implementation.<sup>(19)</sup> As a result, a lot of medium size foreign capital was attracted to the country. This went into manufacturing and wholesale trade which generated growth output at the rate of 30 percent from the mid 1970s and beyond.<sup>(20)</sup>

These developments sustained economic growth in the country throughout the period under consideration, except in 1981/2 - 1982/3 when there was a slump in international prices for diamonds.<sup>(21)</sup> The impact of this development on Botswana's economy was immediate. Foreign exchange earnings fell, and the contribution of minerals to the G.D.P. also declined. As revenues experienced a decline, government had to introduce some austerity measures to reduce expenditures and allocation of foreign exchange resources.

Table 2: Trends in Export Trade, 1965 - 1982 (P. Million)

	Exports				Imports		
	Meat & Animal Products	Diamonds	Copper Nickel	Other	Total	Total Imports	Trade Deficit
1965	9.6	-	-	0.5	10.1	16.6	- 6.5
1966	10.4	-	-	0.3	10.7	18.8	- 8.1
1967	9.0	-	-	0.2	9.2	22.4	-13.2
1968	7.0	-	-	0.5	7.5	23.2	-15.7
1969	0.2	0.2	-	2.7	13.1	34.3	-21.2
1970	-	-	-	-	20.0	44.8	-24.8
1971	17.0	11.7	-	2.3	31.0	60.8	-29.8
1972	19.5	19.5	-	5.8	44.8	84.0	-39.2
1973	32.5	20.0	-	6.5	59.0	111.7	-52.7
1974	33.6	30.1	8.3	9.7	81.7	121.5	-39.8
1975	38.0	32.1	22.0	13.0	105.1	157.2	-52.1
1976	46.0	37.0	52.0	18.0	153.0	181.0	-28.0
1977	48.0	47.0	40.0	18.0	153.0	227.0	-74.0
1978	28.6	79.3	52.6	32.2	164.1	-	-
1979	41.0	215.0	64.0	71.0	391.0	408	-17.0
1980	55.0	223.3	91.0	44.0	413.0	523.0	-100
1981	95.0	375	60.0	69.0	599.0	664.0	-65
1982	79.5	243.2	64.5	80.3	467.4	703.7	-236.3
1983	79.1	463.9	65.8	88.0	696.7	805.9	109.2
1984	62.4	616.0	68.2	198.4	857.1	895.2	38.1
1985	97.6	1,049.0	119.9	317.2	11385.1	1094.6	+290.5
1986	NA	1,130.5	121.0	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Statistical Bulletin, Vol 4. No.8 (December, 1979) pp. 9, 10, 18, 19; see also Statistical Bulletin Vol 5, No. 1 (March 1980) pp. 9, 10, 18, 19; World Bank, Economic Memorandum on Botswana, (October, 1985) pp. 118.

**Table 3: Government Recurrent Revenues in Selected Years**  
(In Millions of Pula)

Year	Sources				Total
	Customs and Exise	Other Revenues	Mineral Revenues	Other or External	
1966/67	1.1	2.2	-	2.9	6.2
1969/70	5.1	2.4	-	3.1	10.6
1971/72	8.3	3.8	0.9	4.1	17.1
1973/74	20.9	8.9	2.8	8.1	40.7
1975/76	24.9	22.8	15.2	10.1	72.7
1977/78	37.8	29.0	13.6	24.1	104.5
1979/80	80.2	55.4	76.6	48.9	261.1
1980/81	102.0	66.4	101.1	48.7	318.2
1981/82	104.3	101.7	77.0	51.6	334.6
1982/83	114.3	132.8	99.4	68.2	450.6

Source: The Mid-Term Review of NDPV, p.6

**Table 4: Trends in the Balance of Payments, 1975-82 (P Million)**

Items	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
<u>Current Items</u>								
a) Bal. of visible trade	-55	-39	-49	-54	0	-45	-239	122
b) Bal. on services	+8	-10	-7	-51	-75	-115	-49	-59
c) Transfer payments	+16	+50	+79	-67	-105	+99	+116	+120
Bal. on C/A	-32	+1	+23	-33	+30	+61	-171	-61
<u>Capital Items</u>								
Bal. on Capital Account	+57	+1	+2	+71	+71	+120	+91	+93
Net Error and Omissions	-	-	-	-	-6	+13	+19	+24

Source: Statistical Bulletin, Various Issues from 1977; World Bank, (1985) p.116.



This negative trend was, however, reversed from 1983 when prices of diamonds began to improve, and the economy resumed its upward trend. Despite the upward trend, however, the impact of the diamond slump exposed the vulnerability of the economy to changes in the international economy. The heavy reliance of government revenues on a narrow base (i.e export of beef, diamonds and copper) led to a call for diversification of the economy. However, not much was done towards this end except for the emergence of small and medium size manufacturing industries which produced mainly for the local market. Overall, the economy remained largely healthy throughout the period under review.

### The Agriculture Sector

Cattle are an important part of life in the Tswana society. They customarily provide draught power as well as essential protein in the form of milk and meat. This dominant role of cattle in the subsistence economy partly accounted for the development of the mafisa system which provided access to draught power to households that did not have cattle. Inequality in the distribution of cattle, however, continues to grow. A study done by Colclough and McCarthy found that about 45 percent of households in Botswana did not have any cattle; that 40 percent of the households owned up to 50 herd of cattle each; and that only 15 percent of the population owned about 75 percent of the total national cattle herd.(22)

Since agricultural output was (and still is) associated with access to draught power, those without cattle play a marginal role in agricultural production. Such households are particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of droughts. On the other hand, those with up to 50 cattle contribute meaningfully to agricultural output and usually keep surpluses to take care of bad years. Big cattle ranchers, however, play a marginal role in crop production, as their main interest is in the production of cattle for sale.

During the period under review, the government introduced a number of schemes to improve agricultural output. Most of these schemes were, however, geared towards the 40 percent of farmers owning up to 50 herd of cattle and more. Such farmers benefitted from the master-farmer scheme between 1962-1973, (23) which, unfortunately, did not prove to be a success, and was abandoned. This was followed by a more widespread extension effort aimed at small farmers. (24) Despite the schemes' focus, extension workers concentrated their activities on a small group of successful farmers. Although the scheme also failed, it, nevertheless, had excluded the poor from the benefits of economic expansion.

The Arable Lands Development Programme (ALDEP), and other agricultural schemes which were introduced during a period of boom in the economy, excluded the rural poor, and thus, accentuated the gap between the rich and poor in Tswana society. Similarly, the introduction of the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) in 1970, benefitted largely the big cattle ranchers. Big cattle owners seized opportunities provided by TGLP to lay exclusive claim on tracts of land on which they drilled boreholes for watering their cattle. With access to bank loans, members of the "cattleocracy" were able to improve their cattle breeds in exclusive grazing areas, and thus, maximized their opportunities for capital accumulation.

Commercial banks were not particularly interested in extending loans to small cattle owners (i.e. those who owned less than 50 cattle). Since members of this group could not raise enough funds to buy farms (except as a syndicate) some of them were bought out of their former grazing areas by big ranchers who could afford loans. With the creation of the National Development bank (NDB), opportunities for credit to both small and big cattle owners became available (25). Non-cattle owners had no access to both commercial banks or NDB credit. This situation facilitated social inequalities in the country.

In effect, the plight of the 45 percent of citizens who do not own any cattle continued to worsen despite phenomenal economic growth rates in the country. That this situation obtained, reflected the failure of the state to improve conditions of the rural poor on one hand. On the other hand, it reflected commitment of the state to serve the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and international capital.

### Employment And Income Distribution

During the colonial period, the active male members of the Tswana society worked in South African mines under a contract system.(26) Others found employment in South African farms and in the construction industry. The figures for those who worked on farms and cities are not known, but it is assumed that those who worked in the mining industry numbered about 10,000 during the 1930s and by the time of independence, they had increased to about 30,000 men. This number soared up to about 40,000 or a third of the total labour force during the early 1970s.(27) Through the system of deferred payments, mine workers brought home money which had implications for the rural economy. Despite low exploitative wages deferred payments insured that poor members of the society had access to cash.

Since independence, and the advent of economic boom in Botswana, many workers began seeking employment locally. With the expansion of towns, government activities and retail trade, job creation grew at the rate of 10 percent per annum in the 1960s.(28) Formal employment increased from 20,000 in 1960 to 62,000 in 1977 and to 122,000 by 1985. These figures, however, represent only 20 percent of the labour force that was joining the labour market per annum. During the 1960s and 1970s the active labour force was growing at the rate of 5,000 to 6,000 per annum,(29). However, only 50 percent found formal employment during this period of economic boom. However, the

economic boom by-passed the lower strata of society. Amongst those who found employment, industrial workers received relatively low wages. Professionals and top civil servants earned fairly high salaries.<sup>(30)</sup> It should be noted that Botswana inherited an extremely inequitable salary structure from her former colonial master. The ratio of salaries of senior civil servant to that of lower industrial class workers was 40:1. This salary structure remained in operation until the 1970s, when successive salaries review commissions decided to reduce the gap as shown in Table 5.

Unskilled workers, like the rural poor, marginally benefitted from the economic boom, whilst civil servants and the business community accumulated cash incomes and property. The high salaries of civil servants and private sector employees gave them access to commercial bank credit for investment in cattle, real estate, small retail businesses and luxury goods such as cars. Through various avenues to credit and high salaries, the civil servants, politicians and managers were able to maximize their opportunities for accumulation and the reproduction of their class through education and salaried jobs. Thus, to this extent, the economic boom exacerbated class differences.

Despite attempts to reduce the gap between the highest and lowest salary groups, unskilled labourers continued to receive meagre wages. They could not afford reasonable housing in urban areas, nor were they able to educate and support their families effectively. The Self Help Housing Agency (SHHA) introduced in the mid 1970s, <sup>(31)</sup> has hardly solved the problem of housing among the poor. Although some of them secured small long term loans at low interest rates, they could not raise enough counterpart funds to build decent houses. The scheme benefitted the skilled, technical and senior clerical workers who had reasonable cash earnings.

Table 5  
Change in Government Salary Scales (Pula) 1964-78

Categories of Labour	INCREASE		INCREASE		INCREASE		INCREASE		
	1964	64-70	1970	70-4	1974	74-6	1976	76-78	1978
		%		%		%		%	
Unskilled Labourers	166	27	211	150	528	20	634	13	713
Skilled Labourers	317	17	370	79	729	20	871	12	977
Junior Clerical	318	17	372	42	528	20	636	8	684
Senior Clerical	576	2	528	45	768	20	924	26	1,164
Technical	1,488	-7	1,380	32	1,824	21	1,208	10	2,424
Admin/Professional	2,172	-1	2,160	25	2,700	21	3,264	31	4,288
Department Head	5,790	-7	4,400	18	6,360	20	7,644	33	10,176
Permanent Secret.	6,030	-7	5,580	23	6,864	20	8,244	45	11,976
Ratio									
Perm Sec/Unskilled	36/1		26/1		13/1		13/1		17/1
Admin/Unskilled	13/1		10/1		5/1		5/1		6/1
Admin/Junior Clerc.	7/1		6/1		5/1		5/1		6/1
Urban Cost of									
Living Index	63.2		74.6		100		125		156
%Increase in Index		18		34		25		25	

Source: Colclough and Macarthy, The Political Economy of Botswana, 1980. p.185; Central Statistics Office, Rural Income Distribution Survey in Botswana, 1975. p. 72.

## Conclusion

This paper has briefly shown that Botswana experienced one of the highest economic growth rates since independence. The government was able to invest in the development of human resources and physical infrastructure. A number of roads, and social facilities such as schools, hospitals and health care centres were established in many parts of the country. However, the lowest socio-economic groups were by-passed by the benefits of economic growth. It has been argued that the poverty in which about 45 percent of rural households live was not alleviated. Instead, their situation deteriorated further as a result of policies which tended to favour relatively rich members of the society.

Social inequalities in the rural areas intensified exponentially. In towns, only a small percentage of the active labourforce found formal employment. This was partly because of limited industries, and partly because of the utilization of capital intensive methods in potential employment sectors, like the mining industry. In any case, workers received wages that were too low to help them subsist above the poverty trap. In contrast, top civil servants were paid high salaries and got access to credit which enabled them to maximize their chances for accumulating wealth. Government salary structures and policies of commercial banks helped to accentuate class distinctions over the years - a situation which may not augur well for political stability in the future.

This paper concludes by suggesting some remedial measures to alleviate both rural and urban working class poverty. It has been proposed that a long term financing programme coupled with other instruments aimed at the rural poor may improve their condition over the long run. It has also been suggested that salary adjustments should have as their primary objective the creation of a decent standard of living for everybody. The unskilled labourers also deserve decent housing and have an

obligation to provide for their families, like members of the bureaucracy. Therefore, equity in the distribution of resources must be a major concern for government.

FOOTNOTES

1. World Bank Mission, Botswana, Public Expenditure and Development in Botswana. (Gaborone 1986) p.8
2. Republic of Botswana, National Development Plan, 1985-91 (Gaborone, Government Printer 1985), p-p9 and 12; also see Republic of Botswana, The Midterm Review of NIP V, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1983), p.5.
3. C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, The Political Economy of Botswana; A study of Growth and Distribution, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 65-69.
4. World Bank Mission Op.Cit p.8
5. C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, Op.Cit. p.54.
6. World Bank Mission, Op Cit p.8.
7. Calculated from Republic of Botswana, National Accounts of Botswana, 1964-66. CSO (June 1968), p.6; also see Hans-Erik Dahl, "Economic and Social Development in Botswana, 1966-78" in Charles Harvey (ed), Papers on the Economy of Botswana, (London, 1981, p.11.
8. Ibid p.10.
9. C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, Op. Cit p.55.
10. Republic of Botswana, Statistical Bulletin. Vol. 4 No. 4 (December, 1979) p.35; also see Republic of Botswana, National Development Plan 1985-91, Op Cit, p.14.

11. C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, Op Cit, p.10.
12. Republic of Botswana, National Development Plan, 1976-81, (Gaborone, Government Printer, 1977), pp. 184-185.
13. C. Colcough and S. McCathy Op Cit p70; also see NDP 1985-91 Op Cit p.28; The Midterm Review of NDPV Op Cit p.84.
14. Statistical Bulletin (December 1979) Op Cit p.27
15. Republic of Botswana, National Accounts of Botswana, (1973/74) p.6-1.
16. Hans-Erik Dahl. "Economic and Social development 1966 Op Cit P.11; World Bank Mission, (1986) Op Cit p.19.
17. The Midterm Review of NDP V. Op. Cit p.6
18. Statistical Bulletin in (December, 1979) Op Cit p.36; also see NDP 1985-91 Op Cit p. 29.
19. C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, Op Cit, p.61
20. The Midterm Review of NDP V Op Cit. p.11
21. C. Calclough and S. McCarthy, Op.Cit pp. 111-112.
22. Ibid
23. B. Lever, Agricultural extension in Botswana" University of Reading, Development Study, Reading. No. 7 (1970) pp29 and 34.
24. C. Bond, "Women's Involvement in Agriculture", Gaborone (1974) mimeo p.42.



25. David Jones, "Arable agriculture in Botswana: a case for subsidies" in C. Harvey (ed) *Op. Cit.* p.31.
26. C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, *Op Cit.* p.118.
27. Ibid, p.135
28. Central Statistics Office, Report on the Population Census, (1971) p.111.
29. Statistical Bulletin, (December 1979), *Op Cit.*
30. Ibid p5; also see C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, *Op Cit.* p.177.
31. Central Statistics Office, Rural Income Distribution Survey in Botswana, (1974/75), p. 72.

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