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**EMPOWERING THE POOR AND OTHER DISADVANTAGED  
GROUPS**

**A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The economic empowerment of citizens is an important defining characteristic of any society. Economic empowerment is about increasing people's choices and opportunities using available limited resources to assist them to determine their destiny and future in the most productive and sustainable way. In today's world, economic empowerment should incorporate environmentally friendly approaches. The case for new initiatives towards economic empowerment in Botswana, is certainly a necessity and comes at a time when hope for all our people at the dawn of the new millennium is at its highest. A lot of social problems such as crime will almost certainly escalate if citizens of any country feel that they are not provided the support they deserve from their country's resources. Economic empowerment has become a more feasible approach that policy analysts consider suitable to address problems of poverty more appropriately.

This paper attempts to outline past and proposed future action plans undertaken by the government, the private sector and civil society to further citizen economic empowerment among the poor and other needy groups in Botswana. In particular, three groups viz., remote area dwellers (RADs), women and the youth are discussed here. These groups are considered to form the core of the needy population in Botswana. Although economic empowerment for most people in Botswana is more about the need for one to live a decent life such as a earning a good living wage, good water for human consumption, good sanitary conditions and housing, for the needy or disadvantaged groups, economic empowerment is about addressing basic needs. Economic empowerment of the poor and other disadvantaged groups as discussed in this paper, is about liberating these people from depending on government handouts for food, clothing, and public works programmes for pocket money. Most of the groups literally use what is supposed to be supplementary feeding for their malnourished children and TB patients, other medically selected vulnerable groups as their basic food. For most of them, access to a toilet is a luxury. The chance for their children to progress in the school system until they are in a position to use it as an economic empowerment tool are almost close to zero.

The paper will be organised such that for each group, there is first a brief situation analysis followed by an outline and review of past and future action plans. The final section acknowledges past efforts to address economic empowerment of the disadvantaged communities especially in the rural areas. However, it proposes that a people-centred approach such as the community based strategy as approved by government need urgent implementation. The paper proposes that government should take a responsibility to guide the development process and influence more closely the outcome of this process towards empowering the poor of the poor (needy groups) and other disadvantaged groups. Economic empowerment should enable them to have access to, among others, three decent meals a day and sleep under a roof suitable for human habitation and easy access to other social amenities. One proposal put forward in this paper is the development of growth points depending on the comparative advantage of each region in the country. And more precisely, promote government intervention in marketing of products that communities in rural areas produce from economic empowerment assistance programmes. This would provide the basic beginnings towards self sustenance through improved incomes that could bring about a decent life and not just enabling a person to purchase food.

## **2. DISADVANTAGED GROUPS**

### **a) Remote Area Dwellers (RADs)**

Remote Areas Dweller (RAD) is an official term used by government to describe those people who live in settlements located far from basic services and facilities centres (UNICEF, 1993). RADs generally tend to: a) live in small scattered communities and are sometimes mobile covering large areas, b) be poor, lack adequate cash income or have the lowest wages, c) lack livestock and rely heavily on hunting and gathering as a source of livelihood, d) have no or inadequate access to water, e) be based on a natural resource base that is increasingly becoming scarce, f) have a low level of literacy or those who lived outside established villages. (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1996; Hitchcock, 1988).

Although poverty is widespread in rural areas throughout the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, in Botswana, the case of Remote Area Dwellers is made more critical by long distances between their localities and markets, a relatively limited access to social services such as hospitals, and generally higher prices for commodities in shops than

people living in densely populated areas in eastern Botswana.(Hitchcock, 1997). Employment opportunities for Remote Area Dwellers are very limited as in all rural areas. In their case, remoteness of their localities has meant that most employment opportunities are found in farms or cattle posts where wages are generally lower than in other formal employment activities. In the formal sector, the minimum wage applies, while this is not the case in agriculture.

In 1992, an estimated 52, 250 RADs were living in seven districts and of these 64 percent were Basarwa. As more than half of the RADs are Basarwa, the term RAD is often used interchangeably with Basarwa. Most RADs are characterised by lack of the necessary means of production such as access to fertile agricultural land, lack of enough livestock for use as draft power, low levels of education, poor nutritional status and low incomes (CSO, 1991; MFDP, 1997a; Hitchcock, 1999; MFDP, 1997b).

Some of the first efforts by government of Botswana to economic empowerment of RADs include the initiation of Bushmen Training and Settlement Project and the Kalahari Wildlife Utilization Project under the National Development Plan 1 (Hitchcock, 1988). However, these were never implemented. The second attempt was in 1972 when government appointed an officer to oversee 'Bushman affairs' after whom a committee was appointed to look into the affairs of all those people defined as hunters and gatherers than focus solely on Basarwa. It was further agreed that the committee should not try to force people to give up their traditional lifestyles but, rather, to encourage them to integrate into the national social and economic system. Intergration was expected to occur gradually and on an equal basis with other citizens. In 1975, the Bushmen Development Programme was incorporated into the National Development Plan 4. The major focus of the programme was to provide social services and physical infrastructure for remote area dwellers as well as to promote economic opportunities for them. In 1977, the programme became the Remote Area Development Programme and it aimed at extending services and opportunities to people based on their being socially and economically disadvantaged as a result of their geographic remoteness from villages.

With problems of overgrazing and shortage of land in the communal areas of Botswana the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) was initiated in 1975. This programme aimed to address the above problems by zoning land into tribal land (communal), free-hold land, state land and wildlife management areas. Although most RADs were depended on hunting and gathering, no land was set aside for this purpose when zoning decisions were made nor was there any land reserved. Thus completely dispensing safe guards for the poor. Despite recommendations by two surveys of the major TGLP commercial areas in the western sand veld region of Central district and the northeastern Kweneng district that land be set aside basically as hunting and grazing areas, no decision was made to this effect. By 1988, 20,000 people resided in commercial ranching areas and were already being required to leave the ranches because of an earlier decision by the Attorney General that disqualified them from acquiring the rights to hunt, gather, graze livestock, cultivate fields and send their children to school as they did before the zoning of the land into TGLP ranches. This has been a major economic dis-empowerment of the RADs by denying them access to the right to own land they inhabited. As a result, RADs were not accommodated in this programme. These constitute some of the past decisions that helped the process of leaving RADs behind other communities in rural Botswana.

There is a need for government to change or shift emphasis on how to intervene on the conditions of the RADs in order to empower them to live productive and economically sustainable lives. This could be done by assisting them to use their own initiative and be outward-looking. For instance, providing clear specification of their rights and obligations; first to the land they live in and the natural resource in their surroundings; secondly providing them with a range of choices in terms of information on how can assist them; third enabling them to know what they can freely demand and what they cannot demand from the services proved and facilitating information flow on what structures are available in the event they are not satisfied with the services provided. In addition, there is a need to adjust existing RADs empowerment programmes to complement initiatives that recognise local people's culture and develop their skills into productive enterprises.

FAP, ALDEP and others are known to provide mainly inputs and the extensions services but do not provide services between the farm gate and the buyer/market. Government should encourage formation of groups around common interests encouraging them to demand their rights, protect their markets as well as maintaining a sustainable environment in order to maintain a flow in the resource base of their natural resource asset. At present most RADs may know their rights but may have very little power to demand them. This discourages them from acquiring the ability to ensure that they receive a quality service that is also easily accessible in future, development approaches that are community based and are built on local customs and values of the people concerned such as the Kuru approach needs to be considered as a way of economically empowering the RADs.

#### **b) Women**

Of 1.3 million people in Botswana, 52 percent are women (CSO 1991). Although the government recognises the importance of women's role in economic development and has made efforts to reduce the disadvantages and inequalities they face, women remain the majority among the poor and disadvantaged. Much remains to be done if women are to be economically empowered. In terms of labour force participation, women are far behind men at 38 percent compared to men's 69 percent (UNICEF, 1993). Further, over 25 percent of women are domestic workers. Along with agricultural workers, domestic workers are the most poorly paid and they are not protected by minimum wage regulations. Generally a large proportion of both domestic and agricultural workers are women and earn below the minimum wage. Often, they work long hours for low pay, and are in a poverty trap, whereby they enter domestic service because their poor educational attainment prevent them from finding any better job. In domestic service women have little opportunity to improve their education or gain marketable skills and experience. Their low pay only covers their subsistence and contributes little towards paying for the needs of their children and families (UNICEF, 1993). As a result, they are unable to accumulate enough savings to invest in their futures or provide a safety net to help in hard times.

Female unemployment in Botswana is also substantially higher than that of males. In 1991, the unemployment rate for female was about 18 percent nationally with roughly 19 percent in urban areas and 14 percent in rural areas. In comparison, male unemployment stood at 12 percent nationally with 12 percent in urban areas and 11 percent in rural areas. Of the total formal sector jobs in 1991, two-thirds were held by men and only one-third by women.

The 1991 census results also revealed that 47 percent of households in Botswana were headed by women (Table 1). The proportion was higher in rural areas (52 percent) as compared to urban areas (34 percent). Consistent with other research findings, poverty affects more female-headed households than male-headed ones. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) of 1993/94 noted that half of people living in households headed by female were below the poverty line. The corresponding figure for male-headed households was 44 percent. Further, male-headed households in urban areas are estimated to have 2.6 times as much earning power as more than those headed by females. In rural areas, the figure is 1.8 (UNICEF, 1993; MFDP, 1997).

In rural areas, 38.1 percent of the population has never attend school higher than in urban areas where 20.8 percent has never attended school. Of these rates, 36.5 percent of females in rural areas have never attended school. In urban areas, 17.9 percent females never attended school. In rural areas, 44.18 percent of economically active female worked for cash lower than 68.4 percent of economically active women working for cash in urban areas. 62 percent of economically inactive females in rural areas were engaged in housework activities, far higher than 12.2 percent of females in urban areas doing the same.

Although, diamond mining has outstripped cattle farming as the mainstay of Botswana's economy cattle ownership remains an important form of household wealth and source of social status, especially among the rural population. Despite this, there is historical evidence that female-headed households in Botswana are less likely to own cattle than male-headed households and generally own few if they own any. The UNICEF/ MFDP

1993 Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Botswana reported that female-headed households owned only 12 percent of all cattle on traditional farms. This means that, women are generally losing out a lot of government transfer through heavy subsidies on the livestock sub-sector, including the European Union subsidy in this sector that cattle owners enjoy through high prices from beef exports. As a result, the loss that women incur relative to the gain that men are accessible to through their engagement in the cattle industry dis-empower women to take command of their lives. The low numbers of women who own cattle can be attributed to among others, strong cultural ties that have assigned the responsibility for ownership and cattle farming to men at the exclusion of women. This calls for government to take appropriate steps and facilitate the development of our culture so that women can acknowledge the value of cattle in a free environment and begin to take advantage of this sector. Provision of an enabling environment for women to own cattle as a measure of economic empowerment would give them control over productive assets and money from cattle sales. This would provide women with access to the opportunities they need for success and control of their livelihoods.

**Table 1: Population by Selected Population Characteristics and Rural-Urban Residence, Botswana, 1991**

<i>Population Characteristics</i>	<i>Rural (%)</i>	<i>Urban (%)</i>
Female -Headed Households	52	34
Population Never-attended school	38	21
Female never attended school	37	18
Female worked for cash	44	68
Female in housework	62	12

*Source: CSO, 1991*

### Past Action Plans

Some of Botswana's production-oriented development assistance programmes particularly target women. This paper will look at two programmes: Financial Assistance Policy (FAP) and the Arable Land Development Programme (ALDEP). The choice of these programmes was based on the fact that the FAP applies to the manufacturing sector and non-traditional agriculture and has a general objective of promoting the growth of viable productive



activities and employment. On the other hand, ALDEP is aimed at poorer farmers engaged in traditional or subsistence agriculture. Thus they represent the two main sectors of the economy. In addition, the two programmes have been in operation for over 10 years and this provides substantial experience on which to assess their effectiveness, and women are generally given more favourable financial assistance than men under these programmes.

a) Financial Assistance Policy (FAP)

Established in 1982, the FAP's major objective was to stimulate the growth of sustainable, productive employment through the granting of non-repayable grants to eligible businesses. This was done in response to concern about the rate of unemployment in the country and the perception that the unemployment would keep growing with the relatively high rate of population growth and the failure of the agricultural sector to provide incomes above bare subsistence level for any significant proportion of the population. Other objectives were to encourage economic diversification away from dependence upon the minerals sector and to encourage citizen participation in business.

b) Arable Land Development Programme (ALDEP)

Established in 1977, this programme's main objective was to deal with problems of low productivity in arable agriculture due to low-yielding traditional practices, low farm income and low employment levels, lack of necessary draught power to do timely ploughing and planting, and lack of labour-saving devices of modern tillage technology (MFDP, 1997).

As most female headed households have fewer productive resources at their disposal than male-headed households, and own no cattle, their capacity to farm crops is often constrained by problems of obtaining draft power. The immediate result of this is that women experience difficulty in meeting the costs of production inputs and general household expenses and are more vulnerable at times of drought. For instance, 80 percent of the temporary jobs created during the 1980-1990 drought relief programmes were filled

by women (Amis, 1990). In 1999, 75 percent of the temporary jobs provided by the Labour Based Projects under the drought relief programme were filled by women (Inter-Ministerial Drought Committee, 1999). The Labour Based Public Works Programme are only designed as temporary relief jobs while the agricultural base of most rural households is out of equilibrium because of drought and provide wages less than the minimum wage. The reason was to discourage potential employees from discontinuing actively looking for productive employment as well as encouraging them to continue with agriculture. The minimum wage is an income level that allows an individual to meet only his/her basic needs. The case for wages from these Drought Relief Projects/ Programme was meant only to supplement existing agricultural income. In the case of women, especially in female headed households, agricultural output is already limited by a poor resource base.

The poor background from which women take advantage of government economic empowerment assistance, require that some protection in the form of government intervention be put in place if they are to empower women to take control of their livelihoods through effective use of support. For instance, while efforts through FAP and ALDEP have had a strong affirmative approach to these groups, outputs of women from these projects have been overshadowed and out-competed by cheap imported products brought in by trade liberalisation that allow foreign hawkers to operate freely in the country. In addition, multinational corporations bent on monopolising international markets dominate the retail sector which women could take advantage of. The major problem with the big retail sector is that they possibly create many jobs outside the country, mainly in South Africa than in Botswana. For example, most packaging for these shops is done outside thus denying the locals access to job opportunities.

In Botswana, many women engaged in traditional industries such as basketry and artifacts, are experiencing stiff competition from Tourists Operators who buy their products at meagre prices and re-sell them to tourist at highly inflated prices. Thus killing the moral for women to sustain themselves. Government should coordinate or monitor the marketing of products from these traditional industries and consider sponsoring the promotion of these products in the international markets. This should be accompanied by appropriate

research in the conservation of the inputs used in these industries, which the private sector can not afford on their own. Further, the big chain stores could be encouraged to assist in marketing products from small scale sector and BOCCIM could be approached in this regard.

### **c) The Youth**

According to Mwansa (1995), the youth, defined as those aged 12-29 years, constituted 40.3 percent of the total population of Botswana in 1992. The fundamental problems affecting the majority of the youth in this country are unemployment and teenage pregnancy. An examination of the unemployment rates derived from the 1991 census shows that unemployment was higher among the youths, especially those aged between 15 and 24 years and this was more so in the urban areas than in the rural areas (Dewah, 1997). In 1994, the unemployment rate for the youth in the 15-29 year age group was 35 percent far higher than the 22 percent unemployment rate for all ages (NEMIC, 1997). This problem is expected to become worse with the recent abolishment of the Tirelo Sechaba Programme that has helped to some extent to give young people some work experience. Already, though the youth comprise about 44 percent of the labour force, the 15-29 years age group accounted for 70 percent of the unemployed. The unemployed youths include those who have completed their education, left the education system prematurely and those who never went to school. It is likely that unemployment affects the young disproportionately both because of the large numbers of youth becoming available for employment each year and because of the shortage of new jobs which the economy. This may also be a reflection of young people's lack of relevant skills and experience demanded in the labour market. For instance, the unemployment rate for form 2 and 3 Junior Certificate Holders who had not received any additional training was 48 percent (NEMIC, 1997).

A number of initiatives have been undertaken by the government and the private sector in an attempt to address the existing problems of few economic empowerment opportunities faced by the youth. Although past programmes such as Arable Land development Programme (ALDEP) were initiated as economic empowerment approaches for the poor,

studies have shown that the poor can not realise enough income to lift them out of poverty through arable agriculture because of lack of adequate rainfall. In addition, for the youth, problems of land access made it difficult for them to utilise the programme. Further, the labour intensive nature of ALDEP made it difficult for the youth in a labour scarce rural economy to use the programme. Similarly, for FAP, rural youth have less chance of using this programme as an employment generator because most projects in rural areas are those benefiting from the small scale sector. A majority of these have limited long-term potential due to lack of markets, skilled employees and infrastructure.

Recently, the private sector has taken initiatives to also contribute in addressing the youth unemployment problem. The main thrust nowadays is that the youth should look into ways of developing themselves as self-employable human capital, rather than relying on looking for employment in the job market alone. The private sector initiatives aim at a more affirmative and comprehensive approach towards the youth's unemployment problems that would provide long term solutions to the problem. One such example is the Junior Achievement Botswana (JAB) programme that aim to empower young Botswana through business education programmes that would assist them to become more competitive in today's business world. JAB programme include information dissemination that develops, in young people, an understanding of the basic concepts of business and economics and the relationship to their life experience as well as positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and self-reliance. In so doing, it prepares young people for a future either as self-employed people or as productive members of the workforce.

JAB uses business advisors from the private sector on a voluntary basis to act as business role models and guide young people about how to operate a small business enterprise and act as effective community leaders. This approach is one way of addressing the empowerment and development of the nation's youth unemployment problem. Since its inception in 1997, JAB has reached out to more than 6 500 youth both in and out of school. This programme is expected to benefits both the youth and the community through the encouragement of entrepreneurship, economic diversification and self-reliance and thus become a more obtainable and desirable goal to address unemployment and poverty.

Teenage pregnancy among the youth in Botswana is one of the major constraints that inhibit youth development and prevent them from effectively utilising available opportunities that aim at long term economic empowerment of citizens such as good education, skills development, and participation in profitable economic activities. This problem grew from 15 percent in 1981 to 23 percent in 1991 among girls aged 15-19 years (UNICEF, 1993). Further school dropouts are more common among girls. For instance, of the total number of school dropouts at secondary school level, 5.3 percent girls drop out as compared with only 1.5 percent of boys (Ministry of Education, 1991). The main reason for high school dropout rates for girls is teenage pregnancy. For instance, of the 2,047 pupils who dropped out during the 1990 school year, over three quarters were females, of whom two thirds left on account of pregnancy. These findings indicate that there is an urgent need for improved information and education to inform adolescents both in and outside school about the risks of pregnancy.

Although government has accelerated its efforts to provide family life education in schools as many as 60 percent of teenage pregnancies is estimated to occur among girls who are not in school (UNICEF, 1993). Therefore, family life education and other school based efforts to tackle the problem of teenage pregnancy miss a significant proportion of youth at risk. A number of NGOs such as YWCA and Botswana Family Welfare Association (BOFWA) have initiated efforts to address this problem. For example, the YWCA Education Centre for Adolescent Women in Gaborone helps teenage mothers continue their secondary education while coping with motherhood. The center also provides counseling and some vocational training. It began as a pilot project with the aim of demonstrating to policy makers and planners that given a second chance, pregnant school girls have the capability and determination to continue and complete their education after child birth.

Most of the young mothers who have been helped since the inception of the program, were still in their early teens when they became pregnant. Nearly all were from poor families living in low income areas, with half being from single parent families (generally a single

mother). The likelihood was that because of the pregnancy, they would drop out of school and never return. Yet after attending the Centre most have returned to secondary school and few have experienced adjustment problems. Eighty percent of them wrote the JC examinations with most of them obtaining a second or third class pass (UNICEF, 1993). This is the only such place in Botswana and it can only reach a tiny minority of the more than one thousand schoolgirls who become pregnant and drop out of school every year. Lack of funding makes it impossible to plan for replicating its success in communities across the country.

### **3. FUTURE PLANS TO EMPOWER THE POOR ECONOMICALLY**

The case for empowerment calls for widening the choices of the poor sections of the population in Botswana. When economic empowerment opportunities for the disadvantaged communities are increased, people's security including of those better off would be enhanced. This could be achieved through a people centred approach where communities are involved in providing solutions to their hardships from the planning stage up to the monitoring and evaluation stages. A programme such as the Community Based Strategy could be fully utilised and given the high profile it deserves to address the incomes, welfare, standard of living and resilience of the disadvantaged and other marginal groups of society.

There is also a need to address the question of defining the rights and obligations of marginalised people with regard to basic necessities such as land and the services provided to them. In addition, programmes and projects that rural people already know and are engaged in such as coping strategies in times of hardships should be developed through research and encouraged in an environmentally sustainable approach. When disadvantaged people know their rights and obligations, they would be able to demand quality services and also respond in an approach necessary to uplift their standards of living. There is a need to provide institutions that would assist in the development of rural people's culture to remove those aspects that inhibit them to respond rationally to economic empowerment opportunities that are opened through government, private business and NGO interventions.

The youth require the development of facilities and information centre that provide specific solution targeted at their problems such as unemployment and lack of skills. These centre should be spread across the country and easily accessible with adequate manpower to service them. These centres should be able to avail a range of options from which they can choose in order to improve and take control of their lives. Examples of services that this kind of centre can provide include integrating at one place the services provided by Labour Department for those registering for employment in view of expected foreign investment, Ministry of Education Bursary Department for those seeking scholarships and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for those seeking information on viable investment opportunities possible for application of FAP assistance.

Botswana is a large sparsely populated country. As a result, the domestic market is thin on the ground. There is a need to develop a viable market within, while still aiming at an export led economy. one way to address this approach is to develop growth points across the country. This would allow targeted government assistant on a geographical basis, depending on the comparative advantage of the economic region of the country. For instance, the north-western parts of the country has a high tourism potential and development path in that region should focus in that area. The south-eastern parts towards Borolong is traditionally a good arable agriculture area, and more government intervention in this sector should be targeted towards this sector. For the western districts, both community based tourism and the commercialisation of traditional arts as well as goods foraged from the wild could be commercialised.

Although government initiatives on citizen economic empowerment are well documented, a major problem with these is that they have not been able to take many people in the rural areas out of poverty. One major problem is that most assistance schemes emphasise on providing inputs and have little contribution to marketing of the outputs realised. There is a need for government to assist throughout from the production stage up to marketing. This has been very successful in the livestock sector. As a result there is a potential to develop a comparative advantage to produce labour intensive value-added exports in areas such as the grapple plant (sengapariie) which have a market in other countries such as Europe. In general, returns to labour would increase as a result of improved

commercialisation and marketing of the various products already produced in small scale through NGO assistance and hence a positive impact on rural welfare.

When a more focused and results oriented development approach is undertaken, poverty problems especially among women in rural areas would more likely become reduced. For instance, nutrition status of children in families engaged in these commercialised activities would improve as more food would become available from their sales. In many cases, the welfare of women would improve as they would have reduced working hours from new technology envisaged from research into this sector. Finally, government input in providing better access to credit facilities, better education, know-how and others would be desirable to realise the positive effects from this proposal.

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