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Provision of Services and Poverty Reduction

The Case of Botswana

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Introduction

Social services constitute an integral part of a country's welfare system. The Botswana Government has, since independence in 1966, delivered varying mixtures of infrastructure, goods and services to Botswana with a view to mitigating poverty and improving the quality of life. To this end, massive investments were made in education, health, housing, water and sanitation because it was believed that such spending would lift people out of poverty. There is ample evidence to suggest that most people benefited from social services referred to above. However, there have been concerns that social provision has generally been unable to make a significant impact on poverty reduction for the majority of Botswana, especially those living in rural and remote areas. Today, while some stakeholders argue extravagance in social expenditure, others point out that, relative to empowering the poor, the outcomes are not encouraging. There is a growing concern that, for the funds spent, not enough is gained in terms of enhancing overall quality of life by reducing levels of poverty.

This paper examines the link between provision of social services and poverty reduction. In particular, the paper seeks to provide some answers to the broad social development question: does investing in social services reduce poverty? The analysis will present evidence from Botswana, paying particular attention to issues relating to educational expenditure, quantity, quality, access and policy reforms in the social sector. An examination of these issues is useful in assessing the extent to which provision of social services have contributed to poverty reduction. Data for this paper were drawn from desk-top review of the literature on poverty and social services in Botswana, review of Government of Botswana official policy documents (i.e. National Development Plans-NDPs), and Census data. The review focused primarily on official documents on education, health, housing, water and sanitation. This was complemented by in-depth face-to-face interviews with key informants such as policy-makers, implementers and/or service providers and some beneficiaries.

This paper adopts a welfare regime approach in the analysis of the role social services provision in poverty reduction in Botswana. The paper consists of five (5) main parts. The first part focuses on provision of educational services. The second part of the paper is about provision of health services. Part three and four focuses on housing, water and sanitation respectively. Finally, the fifth part of this paper pulls together and summarizes salient issues (with implications for poverty reduction) in parts one, two, three and four. In particular, it examines key issues relating to equity, access, synergies between the different services and policy reforms. The paper concludes by reiterating the role of social services in poverty reduction, focusing on education, health, housing, water and sanitation.

Background and context

This paper has been written at a critical stage in the history of Botswana when the country is experiencing a period of rapid social, economic and political change. Forty years after Independence, Botswana has achieved most of its social and economic

development goals as well as some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While other countries in Africa (with the exception of South Africa and Mauritius) are still working towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal number 2 (MDG #2) i.e. achieving universal primary education – Botswana has long achieved it and is now working towards universal secondary education by 2016. As such, Botswana has found a place as a respected member of the international community.

Research over the past three decades has shown that Botswana has made tremendous efforts to reduce poverty. For example, the government has designed and implemented a wide range of social policies and programmes to reduce the incidence of poverty and mitigate its impact. Most have focused on creating opportunities for both wage and self-employment for citizens through provision of universal education. Major policies introduced include the Rural Development Policy, 1972 (revised, 2002) and the Education Policy (Education for Kagisano, 1977) revised 1994. In addition, social welfare services were provided to the needy through different policies and programmes such as the Destitute Persons Policy (1981) revised in 2002, the Remote Area Development Programme (1978) and the Orphan Care Programme (2001). These policies and programmes were designed to address socio-economic transformation of both the rural and urban sectors of the economy with a view to improving the overall quality of life for all Botswana citizens. A review of the different social policies reveals that their implementation has transformed the economy and contributed significantly to a general improvement in the quality of life. While government was able to make headway in this respect, there have been some challenges; including a more pronounced gap between rich and poor. This obviously has influenced the nature of social services provision and approaches to poverty reduction.

Social policy agenda in Botswana has been shaped, to a considerable extent, by both internal and external factors. External factors include: falling commodity prices, unfavorable trade relations and pressure to conform to international influence and expectations. The international community, represented by bodies such as UN agencies, international NGOs and donor agencies, has also dictated the tempo and character of social policy and provision of social services in Botswana. These bodies have directly or indirectly put pressure on the government of Botswana to institute certain reforms in some public policies consistent with global trends and expectations. For instance, since poverty has become a central feature of the international development agenda, international financial institutions and bilateral donors now require recipient's government in developing countries to develop strategies that will reduce the incidence of poverty in their societies. Internally, the development of social policy and subsequent provision of social services has been intrinsically linked with the development and adoption of different welfare regimes and ideological orientations used to guide broad socio-economic policies adopted by the state, at different points in the country's history, to address poverty. Understanding the above factors will help answer the following questions: What influences social provision? What institutional frameworks determine the nature of welfare regime and instruments for social provision and what effects do these have on poverty reduction?

Historical Background: Shifting welfare regime approaches, institutions and policy frameworks

This section adopted a historical perspective to explain the nature, evolution and structural shifts in the policy regime and provision of social services in Botswana. Provision of social services in Botswana has a history that is tied directly to the nation's history. In the pre-colonial and colonial period, response to need was situated within the traditional tribal framework, with the extended family playing a major role. The family, neighbors, community members and the chief played a pivotal role in this regard. Children, the poor, the aged and the disabled were cared for by various members of the family in a fixed order of responsibility. Provision of such essential services as education, health, housing, and water were the responsibility of household heads assisted by relatives, neighbors and other members of the community. Tswana societies then were relatively self-sufficient agricultural economies. Poverty was not widespread and, where it existed, was addressed by the welfare regime of the time or traditional welfare structures. However, since independence (and due to urbanization, migration and other social change factors), these forms of social security have been weakened or have disappeared. The Government is now faced with challenges to provide more formalized services and hence the need for statutory policies to inform and guide such programmes.

Botswana policy regime and provision of social services can be divided into two major historical epochs. Two major phases in terms of ideological direction which have impacted on the social policy agenda and provision of social services in the country's history can be discerned. The first phase constitutes the economic and social policies adopted during the first two decades after Botswana attained independence (the period between 1966-1980). This period is referred to as the Sir Seretse Khama regime (Seretse is the founder and first President of the Republic of Botswana. He died in 1980). The policies adopted during this period were mainly initiated and implemented by the Government with only limited community or private sector involvement. Highly centralized, state led government interventions promoted what is often referred to as the "trickle down" theory of development. The thrust of this theory was to promote capital investment in the mining and other productive sectors of the economy with a view to reinvesting the benefits accruing from such investment in social development. During this period, formulation of social policy and subsequent provision of social services was a preserve of the Government. To this end, the process of social policy formulation was dominated by the central government, particularly, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP). The ministry has overall jurisdiction over the formulation of national development plans. Input from other players such as district and village level institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector was minimal. The foundations of social policy and provision of social services was laid and the stage was set to provide services to all Botswana. This was made possible by a growing healthy economy. For example, economic growth more than doubled between 1966-1980 – growing from 7 % in 1966 to about 15 % at the end of the 1960s and thereafter maintaining a steady double digit for almost two decades.

During this period, social welfare was not associated with any particular class of people or specific communities, but with a polity and the nation as a whole because Botswana

was generally very poor. Social policy strategies tended to focus on how to get the country out of poverty and build a national economy that would grow rapidly and in a sustained manner to achieve a universal rise in the living standards of all citizens. In succeeding decades and in the context of rapid economic growth and widening income differentials, poverty (and hence the need for welfare provision), came to be perceived as a problem affecting certain classes of people. Such people were categorized in terms of their employment situation, sources of livelihood, resource capacity, gender and geographical location. The changes in perceptions were accompanied by changes in the welfare regimes to respond and deal with the challenges identified at different times in the history of Botswana, for example, the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) in 1978 to improve the living conditions of the poverty stricken communities of remote area dwellers, the majority of whom were Basarwa, a marginalized ethnic minority in Botswana. They were provided with education, water supply, health care and other basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. Many are believed to have survived on government social provisions from the 1980s to date. The development of the RADP has been seen as a significant poverty reduction strategy.

The second phase (the period 1980 - 1990; 1990 -2007) was a period of transition and social transformation. The new President came into power – President Masire. He adopted similar policies to that of his predecessor with very slight structural changes to the economy. The status quo remained, except the move towards privatization and a change of responsibility by Government from being a provider to being a facilitator. Some major shifts occurred after Masire's term of office expired in 1998 and the coming in of the Mogae regime (President Mogae is the incumbent President of the Republic of Botswana. He will retire in March, 2008 to give way for his vice Ian Khama). This period involved the development of socio-economic policies guided to a large extent by market forces and “globalization of ideas”. Notably, these changes have necessitated some shift in the socio-economic strategy of the day with a direct bearing on the development of social policy and resource allocation for public spending on such social services as education. The government has since openly embraced a private sector led open market strategy. It is important to point out that, prior to the 1990s, the Government had always been identified with a centralized, heavy handed approach. There is now an aggressive move towards decentralization, less government intervention and a more liberal approach that allows other players to participate actively in provision of essential social services. This approach has meant that the Government has now assigned the private sector and communities a considerable role in the initiation and provision of social services in a cost-effective manner. Government's role is to facilitate community and private sector efforts to provide social services in the area of education, health, housing and water. The extent to which the market approach is followed is becoming very clear. The government has introduced a number of reforms including the liberalization of exchange controls and reduction of company taxes consistent with IMF and World Bank prescriptions. In the arena of education, health, housing and water cost sharing measures such as the re-introduction of user fees and grant loan schemes in education and housing, have been introduced.

It is important to acknowledge that the impact of HIV and AIDS since 1985 is significant in the history of social services provision in Botswana. The advent of the epidemic necessitated a major shift in terms of policy on social spending. Prior to this, social expenditure, especially on education, had always accounted for the highest single percentage (about 45-55%) of total social spending, and a very large share of total public spending (around 17-18%). At present, and because of HIV and AIDS, an enormous amount of funds are being diverted to programmes dealing with prevention, treatment, mitigation, support and care of those infected and affected by the pandemic. For example, programmes such as Community Home Based-Care, Orphan Care and a focus on poor people with chronic illnesses as well as people with disabilities had to be put in place at phenomenal cost, compromising spending in education and other social service areas (Budget Speech, 2007). In addition, labor productivity is adversely affected by high levels of mortality among the workforce -a serious draw back for efforts aimed at poverty reduction.

In addition to the above challenges, it is important to point out that, Botswana is a drought prone country. Immediately after independence in the 1960s, the country was hit by what has been described in some quarters as “ the worst drought in living memory”. Livestock and crops were wiped out and many people impoverished. For example, drought was declared from 1966-1970; 1979-80; 1981-87; 1990-94; 2006-07. In response, the Government introduced “food for work” drought relief programmes to mitigate the impact of poverty. With each succeeding drought, these programmes became a permanent feature of the economy and have been credited with providing social security for the poor and vulnerable, hence a significant strategy for addressing the needs of the drought induced poor. However, research has shown that, although drought relief programmes have succeeded in keeping people alive, they have proved less successful at permanently reducing vulnerability to drought. Most beneficiaries return to a life of poverty when the drought ends and drought relief programmes are discontinued (Duncan et. al, 2000).

Educational development in Botswana 1966-1990

This section will focus on provision of educational services and examines principles that govern how they are provided (for example, universal coverage versus targeting). It will assess the extent to which educational services provided under the different welfare regimes protect and promote the wellbeing of the poor. By examining key issues relating to quantity, access and quality of services and linking them to such variables as spatial location, ethnic origin, and gender, this analysis will demonstrate the effects of education on poverty reduction. The most important question is – does investing in education reduce poverty? The critical issues which will be addressed are, the relevance of services provided; are they of good quality and able to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the poor? Do they address issues of equity and wider coverage? Are the services pro-poor and hence will they respond effectively to pervasive poverty and inequality amidst affluence? Also included will be an exploration of current educational policy reforms and their implication for enrolments and the quantity and quality of education. Answers to these questions are useful in assessing the extent to which provision of education in Botswana has contributed to poverty reduction in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

In Botswana formulation of policies is informed and guided by four national principles namely: democracy, unity, development and self reliance. These principles are rooted in the traditional culture of Botswana and, when applied together in practice, are supposed to achieve the national philosophy of KAGISANO which means “social harmony”. Broadly speaking, KAGISANO embraces concepts of social justice, interdependence and mutual assistance. These principles have been emphasized and used in the various National Development Plans (NDPs) since independence. Through them, the Government of Botswana has committed itself to achieving four national planning objectives, namely: Rapid economic growth, Social justice, Economic independence and Sustained development.

The policies that have guided the field of education in Botswana derived their impetus from the above principles and development strategies. These principles have influenced all social and economic development planning since NDP 1 (1968-1973), and all subsequent development plans have been guided by these fundamental principles. The education system has also adopted the “letter and spirit” of the four guiding principles.

As a long term strategy, the post-colonial government adopted the Transitional Plan for Social and Economic Development (1966-1969) which was aimed at making Botswana a financially viable entity within the shortest possible time. Government was very specific as to how the noble aims articulated in the transitional plan would be achieved. The first priority was to invest in mining so as to achieve rapid and large returns which could be ploughed back into improving the living standards of those who did not benefit directly from the mining sector.

It was anticipated that with the adoption of such a plan, the country will be able to address some of the major problems and challenges at the time. For example, at independence, Botswana was among the 25 poorest countries in the world with a per capita GNP of less than US\$50. Education services were rudimentary and inadequate. Available schools, built mainly by missionaries and tribal regiments, were very few and crowded. There was no comprehensive education policy. The educational system inherited at independence was among the least developed in Africa. According to Duncan et al. (2000) in 1966, about 75 000 or half Botswana’s children of primary school ages were enrolled at school. The quality of education was poor and most children did not

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