

Wretched Lives in A Westernised African Country: The Obstacles Towards Development of Communities in Botswana

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Abstract

This paper is necessitated to advance the narrative that due to westernisation of the economy of Botswana, which is an African country that is glorified for its economic success, rural development has been grossly compromised. The infiltration of westernisation has led to the undermining and removal of economic activities that were pivotal for the development of rural communities. Due to westernisation the economic, political and social performance of rural communities were taken as not germane for western development and consequently discarded by the newly independent government. The paper promulgates the view that communities in Botswana through rural development could improve their living conditions economically, politically, technologically and socially, but are submerged in poverty because of the strong believe that indigenous knowledge was an impediment to economic, political, technological and social progress. The imperialist forces have persistently and aggressively presented western knowledge as a panacea for rural development despite its inappropriateness in some cases.

The rural areas that cherished indigenous knowledge systems that were tested and utilised over a period of time, allowed the communities the opportunities to perfect them and pass them from generation to generation. The westernisation process has denied the rural communities in Botswana to promote the advancement of what sustained them before they got colonised and Christened. The discarding of traditional schools for instances, incapacitated the rural communities, as they lost the system that enhanced skills transfer, promoted industriousness and self-efficacy amongst the recipients.

The importation of western religions detached the rural areas in Botswana from the traditional values that were inculcated on young adults from generation to generation. The traditional leaders got disempowered, leading to their non-participation on matters of community importance, such as land distribution and control of other valuable resources such as the rapacious annexation of livestock from rural communities by urban livestock rustlers.

The paper takes particular interest in the role the traditional leaders used to play in fighting poverty amongst the communities through protecting resources from unbridled greed by politicians and foreigners. The invasion of communities through the enforcement of inherited western laws disempowered traditional leaders by placing them under full control of politicians and foreign corporations. The independence of Botswana meant the replacing of colonisers with western trained leaders, who invidiously upheld western values, with the deliberate effort to transform communities into becoming Eurocentric.

Keywords: Botswana, Westernisation, Poverty, land encroachment, traditional leaders and re-colonisation.

Introduction

Botswana is an African country that has a population estimated to be around two million six hundred thousand (1.6 m), which resides in both urban and rural areas. What is common about the population in rural and urban areas is that it consist of both wealthy and poverty stricken citizens, who have watched their livelihoods getting eroded because of the invasion of foreign forces in the economic, social and political spheres. Botswana, which a former British colony, at the time of its spurious independence in 1966, got utterly westernised because of its inheritance of some of the laws that were used by the colonisers. Evidently, the acquisition of independence provided the country with political leaders that predominantly served to perpetuate the dominance of Britain over Botswana, which undermines the ability of the later to maintain indigenous undertakings that were important in promoting economic, political and social development before independence.

It is important to mention that livelihoods of communities got eroded because at its independence, Botswana was led by the leaders who accommodated western concepts such as democracy, which is characterised by the running of elections every five years. The country adopted westernisation, which is viewed by Wright (2006), as a pernicious process that is equated with the negative aspects of capitalism and globalization, which undermine local customs and values and which should therefore be strongly opposed.

The paper is necessitated to indicate that the failure of the political and traditional leaders to oppose westernisation has undermined local customs and values in Botswana. The situation has led to the poverty of the people of Botswana who were dependent on knowledge, skills and attitudes that are indigenous and most appropriate. The political and traditional leaders succumbed to western values and customs, which were imposed through westernisation by the dominant forces that had no regard for what they found in places that they colonised. The most important point is also that after the colonisers left Botswana, the political and traditional leaders, who were already influenced through westernisation, continued to serve their departed masters by also undermining their customs and values, including the roles that the traditional leaders played in the development of their respective communities. It is observed by Hope and Edge (1996) that Botswana's post-independence rapid economic growth have not quite trickled down to the masses, particularly in the rural areas, and this has led to a situation that can be classified as growth with uneven development. It is also worthy to note that in majority of situations the urban areas where most foreigners live, grow at the expense of the rural areas that provide resources. For example, Mahalapye River used to have plenty of sand and has now become muddy after the trucks from the capital city invaded the village and harvested the sand from the river.

The Land question

The role that the traditional leaders played in Botswana in the allocation of land was taken away from them in the modern political arrangement, unlike in the neighbouring South Africa, where according to Nkhiwe (2021), land allocation and administration remains a crucial role for traditional leaders because it is kept on as one of the few de facto powers and sources of influence still available to them in their areas of jurisdiction. This role was played by traditional leaders from time immemorial in Botswana, where land was originally communal. In 1885, when Botswana was declared a Protectorate, three tenure systems emerged, namely; native land (now Tribal land), crown land (now State land) and freehold. This arrangement was replicated from Britain that had earlier rapaciously seized land from the peasants through the enclosure movement, which according to Community Environmental Legal Defence Fund (2024) is

the process which was used to end traditional rights, and was historically accompanied by force, resistance, and bloodshed. It has been referred to as, “among the most controversial areas of agricultural and economic history in England.” As noted by Dyer (2007), the enclosure movement resulted in increased poverty as displaced farmers flocked to cities for work. The cities got overcrowded, and factory jobs provided little pay resulting in them struggling to afford food and housing.

What obtained in Britain concerning how land was seized from its rightful owners resonates with what took place in Botswana. The dispossession of land by white settlers in Botswana was conducted in the manner the enclosure movement was imposed in Britain, which was a push in the 18th and 19th centuries to take land that had formerly been owned in common by all members of a village, or at least available to the public for grazing animals and growing food, and changed to privately owned land, usually with walls, fences or hedges around it (Community Environmental Legal Defence Fund, 2024 and The Land, 2009). In Botswana, like in Britain, the communities were dispossessed of large chunks of land through legislations that were designed to benefit white settlers and later white settlers together with a small section of the population, which consist significantly of modern middle class politicians and to a lesser extent the traditional leaders. It is worthy to note that examples of how the ordinary communities got robbed of the important factor of production, which is the land, can be found in parts of Botswana where indigenous people lead lives of deprivation to the present-day. As stated by Le Roux (2005) in Ghanzi District, where the first white settler called Hendrik Van Zyl, who was notorious for the many elephants and other large game he killed to fulfil his demand for ivory and skins arrived in 1878.

The declaration of Ghanzi as crown land by Cecil John Rhodes in 1894 through his scheme to restrict the Germans (Who ruled German South West Africa) from uniting Tanzania and South West Africa, cannot be considered as enough to attract compensation for the land from the government of Botswana, if the neo colonial country was truly independent. It has to be noted that when Hendrik Van Zyl arrived in the area, the San (Basarwa) had already occupied the area and were evicted in the same fashion that was displayed by the government of Botswana when they were evicted from Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) to facilitate their westernisation and to fulfil interests of exotic corporations. As noted by Knoetze and Hambira (2018) Botswana is one of the countries of southern Africa where records (missionary and government) show that the Basarwa, also known by other names such as the Bushmen and the San, are the original or the oldest human inhabitants in the region. The authors further notes that, historians (Tlou and Campbell 1984) believe that Basarwa have probably lived in Botswana for twenty to thirty thousand years.

As noted by Le Roux (2005), many San remembered the cruellest moments in their history when their traditional hunting routes and territories were suddenly subdivided into farms, without any recognition of their own land use systems or leadership systems. What is notable is that the land from which the San were expelled had wild animals that the government allowed the white settlers to confine to the farms for their benefits. It will be deceptive to point out that The San have had any form of political, economic and social independence in Botswana, since their lives are characterised by dehumanisation by a government that is supposed to protect them. To the current day, Basarwa are exploited in the farms owned by the descendants of white settlers and politicians as cattle herdsman and handlers, where in some cases they are denied formal education and remain confined in the farms for menial jobs. As noted by Global Organised Crime Index (2023) Botswana is a transit and destination country for human trafficking. The most vulnerable groups are the poor communities, especially the San community (Basarwa). These groups are often exploited for labour in the agricultural sector, and children are prevented from attending school

and forced to work on cattle farms. Despite been fully aware that they are instances where Basarwa children are confined to the farms and denied formal education, the government of Botswana has cunningly maintained that making schooling compulsory was not essential.

The problem that aggravates the horrendous economic, social and political conditions that the San are subjected to amid opulence that is available in the commercial farms, is that ethnic divisions (and inequalities) are present but obscured by the dubious claim that the nation is ethnically homogenous (Skidmore-Hess, 2002). It is worthy to mention that surprisingly The San exist in abject poverty in every part of the country, due to discrimination against them by members of other ethnic groups, mostly those that were constitutionally recognised when Botswana got what was supposed to be its independence.

The situation confirms what Good (1999) observed that, state and economic development went hand in hand in Botswana from the nineteenth century onwards: the state developed under a political elite who utilised their power and influence to extend their individual ownership of such key productive resources as land, labour and cattle. What is stated by the aforementioned scholar does not only affect the San, but the poor citizenry in the whole country. Mengisteab (1999) observed that ample empirical evidence supports the liberalisation view that state interventions in Africa have often been self-serving and has led not only to inefficient allocation of resources, but also to the reverse of any efforts of their redistribution. The foreigners cannot be allocated land under the customary law and citizens are currently only allowed a single allocation of a residential plot. This is done to avoid a situation where multiple allocations can be done to benefit just a few citizens. However, individuals are not limited on a number of residential plots they can buy, which has robbed the citizens of their land, as even non-citizens can buy as many residential plots as they can afford. What is disheartening is that foreigners are not forbidden from buying land in Botswana, even those from countries where Botswana citizens cannot buy land. It is important to state that it is only through legislation against the sale of land by locals to foreigners that the sale of Botswana to foreigners can be avoided. It is worthy to note that freehold land ownership has allowed the sale of land to foreigners even for burial, which has turned Botswana into a dumping place for corpses of foreign nationals. What is worth noting is that the encroachment has dire consequences that will be felt by Botswana upon resurrection of foreign nationals that are buried in Botswana.

Oppressive legislations against the paupers

The commercial farmers in Botswana enjoy the same economic advantages wherever they exist in the country, such as in the Tuli Block area. The farm owners can graze their animals outside their farms in the communal areas whenever they want to, which allows their overgrazed farms due to overstocking or droughts to recover. The peasants or farmers in communal areas do not have the same privileges and what worsens the situation is that their animals are often impounded as *Matimela* (Stray animals) by the government from places that were their cattle posts. Despite the animals having recognised brands, they are auctioned by the government of Botswana and the proceeds deposited on national coffers. This arrangement by the government of Botswana has over the years impoverished the small farmers, leaving some with no animals.

The land boards do not allocate the cattle posts to farmers in the communal areas, which leaves them at risk of getting evicted, in some instances for the land to be allocated for the construction of chain stores. The other sad reality is that, in some instances, when commercial farmers trek back their animals into the privately owned farms, they take from the communal areas those animals that do not belong to them. It is worthy to note that the peasants in the communal areas are not allowed to enter privately owned farmers,

as they are often clearly warned that, *trespassers will be prosecuted*. The peasants often lose their animals to the commercial farmers without any remedy, even where suspicion abounds. This happens because as noted by John (2022), the socio-economic status of the people do have a wide range of implications, which include how the police and the courts treat them.

The commercial farmers also have wild animals inside their farms, which are not different from those outside such farms. The arrangement has allowed some people with farms to engage in unbridled poaching of wild animals because of the distance between the farms, wildlife offices and police stations that can immediately notice if the wild animals were killed in a communal area and not in the farms. It is therefore important to mention that the peasants are highly likely to be arrested for poaching for food than the commercial farmers. It is indisputable that some commercial farmers can kill wild animals in communal areas even for taxidermy, to satisfy their desire to decorate their farm mansions and businesses. The situation explains why Botswana does not have white prisoners and yet countries like Britain and South Africa do have white prisoners. In Botswana it seems white people become Engels when they enter the country.

The concealed explanation could be that prisons in Botswana are designed for black people and not for white people. A good example is where Botswana signed an agreement with the United States of America (USA) meant to forbid Botswana from extraditing US citizens to a third country for the purpose of appearing before an international tribunal without the express permission of the United States, even for heinous crimes against humanity. On the other side, Botswana citizens can not enjoy the same privilege should they be arrested for war crimes in the United States of America. It is evident that the existence of the poor people in Botswana is characterised by travesty of justice as the western powers continue to control Third world countries directly and through inherited legislations.

The twilight of the cattle industry

The transportation of cattle to the Botswana Meat Commission (BMC), which is an abattoir that buys and slaughters cattle for both local consumption and export to the European Union markets was done by the Botswana Railways over the years. The cattle were transported from various places along the railway line to a town on the southern part of Botswana called Lobatse. The arrangement was discontinued because the transportation of cattle was privatised, leading to the escalation of transport costs and unreliability that is associated with the use of trucks that belong to individuals and private companies. Botswana Railways (2016) stated that, its strategically laid rail network, coupled with good relations that proved to be a reliable and cost effective mode of transport to use for moving bulk commodities that may be “operationally challenging” for transporting by road. The challenge with transporting cattle by road is that the animals may get negatively affected should private trucks experience mechanical problems. It is obvious that the peasants do not always get paid well for their cattle because the government does not control the prices that are charged by the truck owners for their services.

In addition to getting higher remunerations for their services, the chief executive officers in the parastatals receive fringe benefits such as company cars (which are usually fuelled and serviced by the parastatal or a company that the employees work for) as fringe benefits that may from time to time be recommended by organisational boards that are manned by middle class individuals, who draw allowances that in some cases render the organisations impecunious. What should be noted is that it is the farmers, in case of the BMC, who pay the fringe benefits and any other remunerations from what could be channelled to them as payments for their cattle. Most appointments to the positions within the parastatals including to their

boards, are not based on merit but on political affiliation and personal relationships with those who appoint. The benefits are also not based on work performance, but on appointment to the positions, hence the failure of some parastatals such as the BMC.

In a country without wealth tax and inheritance tax, there is no how Botswana can make the wealth trickle down for the benefit of the poverty stricken. Evidently, the pay structures are designed to immensely remunerate those in top positions, even when they instigate the collapse of the organisations that they lead. The wealthy get wealthier and the poor get poorer because the former make decisions that legitimise their looting of the state coffers, with the poor remaining to endure decisions that are often meant to condemn them to absolute poverty.

The collapse of the general dealers and cooperative stores

The villagers in Botswana had general dealers and cooperative stores that were designed and run by individual members of communities to meet their economic exigencies. Most of the general dealers and cooperative stores have since collapsed, taking away the economic power that the communities had. As stated by Phambuka-Nsimbi et. al (2015) the impact of chain stores on small general dealers was evident everywhere where “Big Brother” opened a store. Almost all the general dealers were either closed or in the process of closing down. The chain stores also led to the collapse of cooperative stores. For instance, the Etsha 6 village, it had cooperative investments that had an annual turnover of more than One million pula (US 100 000), which had since collapsed. It is important to indicate that it is not only economic disempowerment that communities in Botswana suffered because of the vanishing of the income generating ventures, but also lost in the monetary skills that were refined through operating general dealers and cooperative stores. As noted by Seleke and Lekorwe (2010) cooperatives as social economic organisations contributed by improving governance, creation of jobs, generation of income, reduction of poverty, provision of social protection and giving of the members a voice and representation in society. Evidently, the cooperatives got negatively affected because the chain stores, majority of which are from other countries relegated cooperative stores and general dealers to the economic periphery. According to Emongor (2007) South African retail firms increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) fuelled by market and trade liberalisation and regional integration as a major determinant factor. There has been an increase in the number of supermarkets investing in Botswana from South Africa. Some of the retail firms sell what the general dealers and cooperative stores used to sell, such as fat cakes. The indiscriminate sale of commodities has caused economic disempowerment of communities in Botswana that relied on selling and reinvesting the proceeds locally. It is important to point out that unless some legislations exist, most often the foreign investors export their proceeds.

The apt legislations should have been used to prohibit retail stores from selling indigenous foodstuffs (such as fat cakes) to protect the communities from fierce competition executed by foreign entities. The reason that could be advanced for the absence of such protection is because general dealers and cooperative stores rarely had political interests and therefore did not sponsor legislators. Some of the structures where cooperative stores and general dealers used to operate are rented out to the Chinese, which allows them to sell goods from their country and export the proceeds. As noted by Xiang (2019) Botswana's imports from China were worth 11.0 million US dollars. It is indisputable that the mentioned amount include financial resources generated from goods that were sold on structures that used to be general dealers, which in the past provided the necessary economic power to villages in Botswana. The cooperative investments have also suffered the same predicament under the infiltration by foreign traders that do not align their interests

to the needs of communities. Even the employment that they are often hailed for creating is exploitative in majority of instances. It is the exploitative nature of the employment that makes the government of Botswana to often communicate the figures of the employed and not the collective amount that they are paid by foreign investors. As observed by Ngakane (2007), for a long time domestic workers and herdboys have been at the centre of the controversy about their remuneration and working conditions, but pressure groups and social activists are also complaining about deplorable working conditions and minimum wages in the Chinese businesses, which are at the bottom rung of the economic scale. Some of the employees that work in the Chinese run businesses hold tertiary qualifications and yet they are paid slave wages, which could be as little as US \$70 per month.

The prestigious University of Botswana also finds its alumnae that is enlisted in the Botswana Police Service and Prisons and Rehabilitation department been subjected to the same exploitative arrangement because of high youth unemployment in the country. As noted by Nthomang and Diraditsile (2015) youth unemployment is a major policy concern that deserves urgent attention because it has become a threat to the social, economic and political stability of the country. It has led to a variety of social ills, including; poverty, alcohol abuse, crime and social exclusion. According to Statistics Botswana (2023) youth unemployment rate went up by 0.9 percentage points from 33.5 to 34.4 percent. It is important to point out that due to high unemployment of the youth, exploitation has become unavoidable amongst the graduates in Botswana. The universities in Botswana and other institutions that are run by the government, have capitulated to the demeaning conditions that their graduates and qualifications are subjected to. There are some instances where the universities themselves exploit their own alumnae, such as where Diploma and first degree holders in the University of Botswana serve as constables in its protection services section.

The capitalist modern slavery

Upon retirement the civil servants and some workers within the parastatals in Botswana do not get all their terminal benefits. This happens because part of their dues remain with the private investors. After receiving part of their pensions the pensioners get paid a certain specified amount on a monthly basis, despite their money getting invested and making more financial resources for the foreign private companies. The pensioners through their unions do not challenge the arrangement because they would have been conditioned to receive a monthly salary for years during their period of employment. On the other hand, the expatriates, senior civil servants and legislators get employed on contract basis and get all their dues when their contracts come to an end. This arrangement allows senior employees and expatriates to invest whilst in some cases having their contracts renewed. The arrangement does financially capacitate them than to work for a lengthy duration and get part of the terminal benefits when aged, as is the case with those who are employed on permanent and pensionable terms. The reason this arrangement exists is because those who receive contracts have much influence in the economic affairs of Botswana. The inherited arrangement was designed to benefit employees that functioned to safeguard colonial interests and the expatriates who are in Botswana because as economic refugees. It is important to indicate that expatriates prefer to work in Botswana because of the favourable working conditions that benefit them immensely. The other reason is because Botswana is a peaceful country, which presents it as conducive for their economic progress. It is worthy to indicate that expatriates leave a country immediately when it runs into political or economic turmoil, such as when a coup gets instigated. It is therefore important for localisation in Botswana to be taken serious.

The workers when they retire do not participate in the formulation of legislations that govern how their remaining dues can be invested, which means the decisions are made without them, but for them. Like in other sectors of the economy, the pensioners are affected by laws that are made for the benefit of the industry and not necessarily for them. Evidently, some pensioners live in poverty even in Britain where the legislations in Botswana originate from. The Britain Centre for Ageing Better (2023) states that, Commissioner for Older People and Ageing should ensure that policymakers are planning for our ageing population and considering the needs of the poorest and most disadvantaged older people, both among the current retired generation and future generations of retirees. Poverty in retirement should not be considered an inevitability, we need to ensure the progress of the last half a century is not lost.

It is worthy to note that in Botswana at the age of sixty five (65) years every citizen is entitled to old age pension irrespective of his/her economic status, which means even the wealthiest citizens do receive it and yet they can do without it. On the other hand, the poorest citizens do receive an allowance, which most often would be their only source of income. As stated by Botswana Government (2022) old age pension is for Botswana citizens only who are 65 years old and above. Eligible pensioners are required to register either with the Pension Officers at the District Commissioners Office, Service Provider or Headquarters (Social Protection Department). Currently, the pension allowance is BWP 530.00 (approximately US \$40) per month. The fact that the recipients pay Value Added Tax (VAT) on basic necessities to meet their exigencies means part of their old age pension gets lost on tax, leaving them impecunious in most cases. This dreadful situation leads some poor people to drink home brewed alcoholic concoctions that endanger their lives. Due to discriminatory legislations poor people can be arrested for engaging in the traditional methods of gambling, such as flinging of a coin (spinning) and betting on which side the coin will fall. The Gambling Act does not recognise the traditional ways of gambling that pre-dates the western forms of gambling in Botswana. It is disquieting that the country introduced western forms of gambling without any rehabilitation centres to combat its addiction on the population.

Some of the victims of capitalism do receive some support from the Department of Social and Community Development, where they are registered and receive monthly food rations on which Value Added Tax (VAT) is imposed. Botswana unlike Britain does not have Pound land shops, where each item does not get sold for more than one British Sterling Pound, which makes some items to be unaffordable for some people. In Botswana such as in Britain, some people resort to crime in order to survive. As indicated by Dresch and Wood (2022) Brits are reported to be turning to crime to survive. Shops have reported a rise in the theft of low-value items like milk, cheese, cooking oil, baby milk and nappies. The unfortunate reality is that it is the sneak-thieves that usually get arrested, prosecuted and jailed, as opposed to those criminals that steal millions of US dollars through corruption in Botswana. Comparatively, the sentences for corruption are way too mild and are designed to keep the sophisticated criminals out of prisons that are in most instances congested. It is worthy to note that white-collar crimes attract mild sentences because the criminals who commit such crimes can be the decision makers or even legislators, who do not deserve to be incarcerated. The cases are also presided over by the magistrates and judges who jealously protect middle class interests because they belong to that class themselves. The poor people often appear in the courts without legal representation as compared to the middle class hoodlums who can even engage highly schooled advocates to represent them.

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated that poverty is a condition that fostered by self-centeredness of those in power.

It is axiomatic that the poverty stricken do not often participate in the decision making processes that could empower them economically, socially and politically. The legislations that are formulated are not designed to rescue them from their disadvantaged position, but are instead meant to sustain those in positions of influence and foreigners who do not vote during general elections, but are favoured by the decision makers. It is concluded that there is no political will to liberate Botswana from colonial legislations, which has made those that are inherited to continue to have massive influence on how the country is run. The poor people continue to be relegated to the periphery, with the conspicuous disconnect that has managed to maintain the gap that exists between the haves and the have-nots. The oppressive legislations do aggravate the economic situation for the poor who often get dispossessed of their valuables, such as land, which is often given to the foreigners and citizens that constitutes the middle class.

The paper makes reference to the existing legislations that deliberately disadvantage the ordinary people. Notably, the land boards in Botswana do not allocate cattleposts, which means their land can be taken from them and be allocated to those people who are influential or decision makers. What has become clear is that Botswana is still holding tenaciously to western ideals, with less regard for indigenous citizens whose only benefit on democracy is to vote every five years, sing the national anthem, and respect the flag as well as the coat of arms. It is clear that the leaders of the country identify with the foreigners, who they give the resources of the country to. The reluctance of the legislators to make laws that can economically, socially and politically empower the people of Botswana is meant to keep them submerged in absolute poverty. The paper presents apt examples of such laws.

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