

## **SUCCESS CAPITAL ORGANISATION – A REVIEW OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN BOTSWANA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since independence in 1966, Botswana has transformed itself into an economic and democratic success within Africa's post-colonial backdrop. Fiscal prudence and sound management of natural resources led to investing in economic and social infrastructure, along with human resources. This improved development and social indicators of progress, paving the way for an emerging middle class and wealthy elite. This has resulted in the country being one of the most unequal in the world in income distribution and service delivery provision. Those most vulnerable to poverty and income inequality include indigenous people, LGBTIQ+ individuals, women, youth, orphaned children, people living with HIV among others (World Bank, 2011).

Poverty is reducing statistically, however social implications aggravate inequality as harmful gender norms, unemployment and low remuneration are impeding factors. This is despite the country implementing various social protection initiatives: primary and secondary school feeding, Orphaned Vulnerable Children's care, home based care, rural development schemes and providing free Antiretroviral treatment, among others. Gender parity, inadequate vocational training and limited protections for informal traders further complicate the country's social protection make up.

### **NOTABLE STATE INTERVENTIONS**

#### **Orphans and Vulnerable Children**

Botswana's Constitution recognizes an orphan as a child under the age of 18 years old that has lost one or both parents. This is irrespective of whether parents are biological or through adoption. A child is considered vulnerable if they live in an abusive or poverty-stricken environment, or with no access to basic services, or living with a sick guardian (World Bank, 2015). They are recognised by the state through assessment and registration by and with the city council's social and community development office.

#### **Destitute Feeding Schemes**

The 2002 National Policy on Destitute Persons provides a framework for basic assistance to those who do not have any assets, income or capacity to work. Since it being revised in 2008, work is in progress for a reframed National Policy on Needy and Vulnerable Families. The latter goes beyond relief service delivery, as it integrates poverty eradication through providing for counselling services, small business management skills and comprehensive social work. This is aimed at aligning and achieving development indicators. The feeding schemes provide for two demographics: school and vulnerable groups.

The vulnerable group feeding programme provides food parcels through clinics. All packages are tailored to children's age brackets ranging from six months to five years of age. From the age of six, they then move to the school feeding programme. The latter programme is implemented in all state primary and secondary schools under the authority of the Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Basic Education respectively. School children one prepared meal a day, with those in remote locations receiving two. Only those in boarding school receive three meals a day (Van Eck, BPS & Snyman F, 2015). Meals are prepared in school kitchens using already milled or hand stamped grain. Those who tasked with preparing meals were previously under the city council and now under the respective schools.

#### War Veterans Pension

Botswana introduced a pension for veterans of the two world wars in 1998. This was viewed 'as a token of appreciation for their effort and sacrifice in contributing towards saving the World from racist domination'. The pension would continue posthumously to their spouses or children up to the age of twenty-one years old, if both parents have died. It can be claimed simultaneously with the old age pension provision. In the 2009/10 one of the government financial year, there were 2,940 recipients at a cost of over P30 million (Botswana Government, 2015). Other studies have questioned in vain why the cost has consistently been in excess of actual entitlements (Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme Consortium, 2011).

## **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Policies are dated. Even upon prolonged review, they remain out of touch with lived experiences of Botswana. For example, the criteria of recognizing vulnerability and orphaned children do not consider extended family who serve as guardians. Although they might have means to care for children, households might not necessarily be safe. The elderly demographic has challenges with accessing funds they are eligible for. This is because they are accessible through postal office branches. This impacts accessibility for those in remote locations, bureaucracy for where one might be registered versus where they reside and having to endure long lines.

Those under the age of 65 years old, are given cards to access their own state provision – alleviating some of the challenges of access. Most senior citizens are the breadwinners in their families. Which means funds are usually shared with family. In some instances, there is a fear of stigma attached with registering for other social protection initiatives – exacerbating the burden of poverty on the household.

## **GENDER VIEW**

There are no specific policies that address gender disparities within the social protection framework. It does not recognise care work in homes. However, there are initiatives targeting women aimed at economic empowerment provided for under the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs.

## **YOUTH VIEW**

Young people are recognised as those under the age of 35 years old. It is considered the majority demographic. However, unemployment remains high with little protection for all; whether unskilled or skilled. This has led to increased poverty and crime (Byiers, 2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

Programming gaps should be identified and met. This can be done in partnership with civil society organisations that work with communities. There is a need to safeguard the integrity of public funds, to ensure maladministration and corruption do not compromise social protections or

aggravate inequalities. The aggravated poverty among children and the elderly (BIDPA, 2009) need to be addressed more comprehensively. Hunger and malnutrition in early child development stages can have long term impact, inclusive of leading to social exclusion, child labour and sex work. Feeding programmes in schools might not be enough for when children return to homes with little means.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Food hampers should be accompanied with provisions for money to augment the challenges experienced by the elderly
2. LGBTIQ+ individuals should be recognised as a vulnerable group, given the challenges of systemic stigma and discrimination
3. Persons with disabilities should be included in social protections regardless of income levels to enable them with the means to navigate engaging in public society
4. There must be an unemployment grant given to unemployed youth to support them in job seeking and bridge expenses related to securing employment before earning an income
5. There should be regular public consultations and awareness raising drives to uplift all Batswana and include civil society to compliment state service delivery.

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