

FOREWORD

Signing on to the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and subsequently embracing the eight goals that are now referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was a sovereign act for Botswana. We willingly associated ourselves with the logic of the MDGs because we see poverty as an emergency all countries should do all they can to overcome so that human beings will, wherever they are, have opportunities for healthy and sustainable livelihoods.

We committed ourselves to the MDGs because we accept that to make significant and lasting progress against poverty, quantum gains are required in health, education, sustainable use of environmental resources, and equitable North-South cooperation to promote flows of trade, investment, technology, and aid resources.

It should also be noted that the MDGs resonate well with the development ideals we espouse in Vision 2016. Even the most cursory review of our development philosophy and practice will show that our commitment to inclusive development predates the MDGs.

Commentators across the world frequently single out Botswana for good performance in policy making and effective delivery of services to the people. For instance, in its 2003 Report, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa ranks Botswana number one in Africa on its Expanded Policy Support Index, which captures performance in three broad areas - macroeconomic policies, poverty reduction policies and institution building. We are especially proud that our poverty policies and programmes were judged Africa's best.

We accept this honour without any pretence that our policies and programmes are adequate. Still, post independence Botswana has made great progress against poverty. We are now, as individuals, households and communities, substantially richer than we were at independence. We are now also substantially more literate. Had it not been for HIV/AIDS, I would also be saying that we are now substantially healthier, for we have delivered meaningful access to health services to Botswana across our expansive country.

Yes, too many Botswana, an estimated 47% of the population in 1994 and a projected 36.7% in 2000, live below the poverty line. But it is not for lack of effort, or even misdirection of effort, that we have a higher incidence of poverty than countries of comparable economic standing. On the contrary, it is because we face especially difficult structural bottlenecks - a small population, a narrow economic base, a poor natural resource endowment (apart from diamonds) - that the return on our development resources is relatively low.

Quite often, those who question the efficacy of our policies and programmes trivialise the structural challenges we face. We must rank among the countries with the highest per capita costs for service delivery because of the spatial distribution of our small population. Our villages do not provide adequate markets to sustain local enterprises. Neither does our natural resource base provide a natural platform for mass creation of low skill employment opportunities. Unlike other African countries, we cannot earn substantial per capita output and income yields from small per capita investments in agriculture for large sections of the population.

This report accords us an opportunity to get Batswana to dialogue on the development situation in our country and to take the world into our confidence, so that through our own ideas and those of our partners and friends, we may refine our strategies for the future.

HIV/AIDS remains the dominant development challenge of our time because of the damage it has caused and continues to inflict on everything that we have achieved as a nation in the last 37 years: good health and longevity, human capital, institutional capacity, and social capital. Already we are witnessing an upsurge in infant and child mortality, and the incidence of tuberculosis.

Other issues central to our success as a nation are discussed under Goal 8: Building a global partnership for development. These are issues of foreign trade, investment and aid; knowledge creation and dissemination; and technology transfer and diffusion. They require us to focus our energies on raising productivity and the international competitiveness of our goods, and to add our voice to the call for fair trade rules. These issues are central to our National Development Plan goal to achieve "...sustainable diversification through competitiveness in global markets".

Also central to this goal is our capacity to harness the opportunities created by regional and continental arrangements such as the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the SADC Free Trade Protocol and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). They promise access to bigger markets, help mitigate the disadvantage we suffer on account of market size, and in the specific case of SADC and NEPAD, provide a basis for regional co-operation in the provision and management of regional public goods to support development.

Foreign aid and development co-operation served us well in the formative stages of our economic success. Now it is central to our war of survival against HIV/AIDS. We need the goodwill, expertise, technologies and financial resources of others to find preventive and curative solutions to our health problems, including HIV/AIDS.

Finally, two observations in this report warrant emphasis. The first relates to the urgent need for us to strengthen our statistical capacity so that we may more effectively measure our performance and better inform our policies and programmes. Second, Batswana must, as individuals and as families, look less towards the state, and more towards themselves, for their own development. And the state should in turn seek to empower people rather than to do things for them.



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