

Managing Resources and the Democratic Order: Lessons from Botswana.

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Abstract

Africa is a potentially rich continent yet it remains one of the poorest in the world. For the majority of African countries, resource endowment has not only contributed to underdevelopment but has in turn undermined democracy. Public office or politics is a major source of wealth, power and career advancement in part because the private sector remains small and underdeveloped. As a result, political independence has lost meaning to the majority of people in Africa as they live in conditions of squalor in part because resources are being diverted to support expensive lives of politicians (and to consolidate and prolong their stay in office). A number of countries such as Angola, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, just to mention a few, are resource rich yet they have been characterised by political turmoil, corruption and underdevelopment amongst others. Others are experiencing democratic reversals.

However, Botswana may be an exception to this trend - in relative terms. The country is bequest with minerals, particularly diamonds, yet it has not experienced spoils politics and instability or even leadership ripples in the same way as other African countries that are particularly rich in minerals. The paper assesses possible explanations for Botswana's relative economic and democratic success – a rare feature in Africa. It would argue that minerals alone are not a sufficient condition to account for Botswana's uniqueness. It identifies other factors such as the role of its leaders and leadership, its political culture and its ability to adapt democratic principles to local conditions as some of the key factors that account for the success of its democratic development. As much as conditions that facilitated Botswana's democratic development may not be replicated elsewhere, it offers lessons to other African countries in so far as managing resources and the democratic order.

Despite its achievements, the paper also considers some of the challenges that may fade the image and indeed success of the Botswana miracle. Although Botswana has an exceptional democratic record on the African continent / by African Standards, its institutions remain weak. Even though it came out recently to criticize Mugabe and his ZANU-PF for floating/ violating democratic principles, there are a number of issues that point that this miracle has its own limitations and flaws. Even then, its elections have largely been free and peaceful yet they are regarded as being unfair.

Introduction

Africa is a continent that is potentially rich and thus presents opportunities for its occupants. Most countries in Africa are endowed with minerals. However, they are yet to realize their potential because most African countries have been in one way or the other afflicted by problems of unethical leadership, corruption, clientelism, spoils politics,

disease and poverty and in worst case scenarios ravaged by conflict and war in part driven by the need to exploit these minerals amongst others. Instead, neopatrimonialism rules in much of Africa, under which presidentialism, clientelism and the abuse of the public resources are the key features (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 67).

All these dashed the hopes most had for such a promising continent when most countries obtained their political independence some forty years ago. For most, instead of independence delivering developments that transformed their lives, it brought misery and shattered hopes. As a result of these, most regimes in Africa “demonstrated very little developmental capacity” (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 67). This gave rise to a perception to the effect that African countries in general are poorly managed and suffer from problems of poor governance and by extension or in turn poor leadership. This is probable in the light of the potential wealth that most African countries are sitting on. Despite, this gloomy picture being presented here, there are a few exceptions to this general pattern. Botswana is one such an exceptional case when compared to repressive regimes such as Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe that has experienced an economic and democratic reversal. Having said this, it is Botswana’s exceptionality in managing resources and the democratic order that we now turn to.

Managing Resources and the Democratic Order

The central question being explored here is what are the ingredients of Botswana’s relative success in managing resources and the democratic order? What lessons can it offer other African countries that have experienced a freefall? At independence in 1966, Botswana was rarely known. It was barren and poor and had no hope of surviving as a country. That was then. Botswana’s economic situation has dramatically changed with the discovery of minerals, especially diamonds, immediately after independence. Following this, the country experienced phenomenal economic growth averaging 13.9 percent between the years 1965 and 1980, and 11.3 percent between 1980 and 1989 (Matsheka and Botlhomilwe 2000). As a result, the country has leaped from being one of the poorest in Africa to a middle income status in terms of World Bank assessments. On the basis of its past economic performance and achievements realized so far, Botswana is

today regarded as *star performer* and a miracle of economic success by most analysts (Chipasula & Miti 1989; Samatar 1999; Hillbom 2008). All these are in part largely attributable to how Botswana managed its windfall when diamonds were discovered. Thus, Botswana's achievements are rare in Africa and remarkable by African standards. Even then, Botswana is a country that has experienced high growth rates yet it has remained pre-modern (Hillbom 2008). Although the country has vast diamond resources, it has not been subject to high levels of corruption and instability compared to many other resource-rich countries in Africa.

Parallel to this economic success, Botswana is known for its political stability and political success. Unlike most African countries that embraced one party system, Botswana preserved its multiparty democracy. It has, since independence, held regular free competitive elections in terms of the Constitution. The opposition is free to mobilize and contest for political office. Even so, Botswana's democracy is characterised by one-party dominance in part aided by a playing field tilted towards the ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). Even then, its popular vote has been declining over the years. The opposition has performed badly. A number of factors account for this. These include, poor organization, a playing field tilted towards the ruling party and fragmentation of the opposition itself, amongst others. Presently, two opposition parties are represented in parliament, the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) and the Botswana National Front (BNF) with one seat and 12 seats respectively. Even so, the country is perceived as a political success story especially leadership succession – avoiding succession crisis or ripples as in South Africa. More importantly, the country has remained peaceful. In this way, Botswana is counted as the longest running multiparty democracy in Africa. Having said this, what account for Botswana's success in managing its democratic order and economic resources? It is these that we now turn to.

Ingredients of Botswana's Success in Managing Resources and Democratic principles

Every country has a unique history and therefore factors that account for the success or lack thereof could be attributable to a number of factors that are peculiar to its historical setting and conditions that prevailed at the time. In this sense, factors that contributed to Botswana's relative success could not easily be replicated elsewhere but it can offer lessons to its peers. The case of Botswana demonstrates that its success is not one born out of the mineral windfall but a combination of factors played a part. Our argument is based on the fact that there are a number of African countries that are rich in minerals – such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Sierra Leone – yet development has evaded them over the years. This section seeks to identify possible explanations why Botswana did not go the way of other resource rich (minerals) African countries.

Botswana's success could be attributable to the unique role played by the state in economic development that was necessitated by the developmental challenges it faced at independence. As a result, and as was the case in most African countries, the state played an active role in economic development through a number of institutions that facilitated development. One such institution is the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) that infused finance and development planning into one powerful ministry. This linked government revenues with development projects and thus only projects in the national plan were budgeted for. Development planning in Botswana seeks to accomplish the national objectives of economic independence, social justice, sustainable development and rapid economic growth (Republic of Botswana, 1997). Thus, planning by the Botswana state “is intended to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from the limited financial resources available to Government by prioritising policies, programmes and projects. [It] also allows Government to set targets against which its performance can be objectively evaluated” (Republic of Botswana, 1997: 85). To demonstrate the importance the Botswana state attaches to this Ministry, traditionally it has been in the Office of the Vice President (Wallis, 1989; Taylor, 2003). It is not only “the institutional brain of the of the economic policy-making process” (Samatar, 1999:85) but “the

institutional nerve center” of the Botswana state (Ibid.82). It is the institution which plans, coordinates, monitors and ensures that projects that are being implemented are not only in the National Development Plans (NDP’s) but have also been budgeted for. Not only does it oversee approved plans, it also offers economic advice and information to government departments (Republic of Botswana, 1970). In this sense, “no expenditure can be incurred on a project which has not been included in the plan”, and when ministries submit projects for inclusion in the plan, it is often emphasised that ministries should ensure that costs are not only reasonable but be within the government financial constraints (Wallis, 1989:2). This is made possible because the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning is run by professionals who are trained and have the expertise in economic policy making.

Wallis (1989) suggests two key points that were of critical importance in ensuring that Botswana’s planning process was effective: “first, the Botswana case suggests that political commitment and support for planning makes a substantial difference. The First President (Seretse Khama) and his senior ministers showed greater support for development planning than has often been the case elsewhere. Secondly, planning and budgeting have been closely linked” (Wallis, 1989: 52). It is this close connection between planning and budgeting backed by a committed political state structure that is *missing* in most countries (Wallis, 1989). The other thing that is unique about Botswana’s planning process is that it was decentralised to the districts as opposed to most African countries where planning was centralized (Wallis 1989). In this sense, the Botswana state plans within a market economy. Thus, planning in Botswana delivered development as opposed to other African countries where it led to economic failure. What distinguishes this institution from planning institutions found elsewhere in most developing countries is its “power, authority, technical expertise and insulation in shaping the fundamental thrusts of development policy” (Leftwich 1995: 286). This is what sets Botswana apart from most African countries.

What is also distinctive about Botswana is that the political leadership also realized that planning on its own without proper implementation was not adequate. This was clearly

articulated by the country's president when it initially opted for planning. The president categorically stated that "my government is aware, too, that planning by itself is not enough, that efficient implementation of the Plan is even more important and [the government promised that this responsibility is carried out] ...the energies of the nation must now be devoted to the economic and social development of the country" (Raphaeli et al 1984 quoted in Wallis, 1989:71). This demonstrates that the political leadership was not only committed to planning but it also had the will to direct and ensure that National Development Plans are executed.

Related to this, Botswana lacked the technical expertise at independence to run the public service. Thus, the country did not localise the public service immediately after independence at the expense of merit. In most African countries localization of the public service was rushed for political expediency. Instead, in Botswana "considerable emphasis [was] placed upon the recruitment of highly competent economist cadre for the planning organisation", and to ensure this, "there [was] a relatively high dependence on expatriates" (Wallis, 1989:52). Similarly, Taylor noted that "expatriates were retained (as opposed to much of the rest of Africa) in order to help train up a local but competent and educated civil service" (2003:4). That is, the process of localisation was not rushed at independence. And "through effective use of expatriate technical assistance (TA) and steady development of local capabilities, the country has achieved a remarkable record of economic planning and management" (Wallis, 1989: 52). Interconnected to this, "was the effort made to ensure that a strong policy-analysis capability was established, together with a planning staff which was continuously involved in budgetary and economic planning" (Ibid.52). Through these efforts, the Botswana state was able to build capacity within key ministries and line ministries, thus, resulting in a bureaucracy that was competent, efficient and largely non-corrupt. In this way, Botswana largely avoided some of the pitfalls (such as lack of capacity) that negatively affected planning in most African countries (Wallis, 1989).

In addition to effective state planning and ensuring a capable public service, Botswana *built public institutions that remained professional and not subject to whim or personal*

rule. Somolekae observes that “Botswana’s bureaucracy has remained one of the most effective and corruption-free in Africa” and the institution enjoys “far greater institutional autonomy than its counterparts elsewhere in the region” (1993:119). Taylor (2003) argues that the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning’s close links with the executive did not only protect the bureaucracy from societal or public pressure but also gave rise to a more or less autonomous, strong and effective bureaucracy (Taylor, 2003). This is unheard of in most African countries where the bureaucratic institution was “neutralized” immediately after independence (Ibid.119). This institutional autonomy has brought positive results for Botswana. Leftwich argues that in developmental states “both the developmental determination of the elite and the relative autonomy of the state have helped to shape very powerful, highly competent and insulated bureaucracies with authority to direct and manage the broad shape of economic and social development” (1996:286). In reference to Japan’s developmental state, Chalmers Johnson states that “the first element of the [developmental] model is the existence of a small, inexpensive, but elite state bureaucracy staffed by the best managerial talent available in the system” (1999:38).

Moreover, Holm asserts that “lack of democratic control over the state bureaucracy has been central in Botswana’s development” as “top bureaucrats excluded elected politicians from most key decisions” (1996:97). This was possible as the bureaucracy was secluded from political intrusion by the country’s presidents, Seretse Khama and Quett Masire, and politicians were instructed to deal with senior bureaucrats, who were equally directed by the presidents not to give any political favours (Holm, 1996). And as Holm puts it “the leadership of the Botswana state, namely permanent secretaries and the first two presidents, have taken advantage of the state’s autonomy to implement an ambitious development agenda” (Ibid. 110). This development agenda has been greatly successful as Botswana’s civil service has guided and produced one of the best economic growths in the third world (Holm, 1996). Thus, economic development in Botswana was not only steered but also influenced by the bureaucracy. Somolekae argues that the policy making process in Botswana “reveals the extent to which the bureaucracy is influential in initiating policy and determining its final content” and more often than not “by the time

[it] goes out to be scrutinized by the political leadership and the general public, its major form and content have been thoroughly defined” (1993:117). This was the case as the political leadership lacked the required expertise needed in policy making and “the bureaucracy was the only developed organ of the state” (Ibid. 117). It is in this context that the bureaucracy was given such an influential role. The Botswana story shows that the MFDP was mainly successful in its role of “high command” as it had the expertise and capacity to perform this critical role. Institutional competence in the MFDP was realized through the establishment of planning units which were manned by qualified professionals (Samatar, 1999).

The other factor that could have contributed to Botswana’s success is the size of its population. Botswana is a vast country with a tiny population that is largely homogenous. With a small population, it means that the size of the ruling class is small. A small ruling class meant that competition to access state resources is less intense when compared to other countries that have bigger populations. More importantly, small population places less political pressure / demands on the state for good and services (Wiseman 1977). For Wallis, Botswana “is a small country with ...relatively simple issues to resolve” (1989:72). Although the demands on the state had been moderate, mineral revenues strengthened the ability of the state to respond to demands placed on it (Wiseman, 1977). As a result “there is an absence of overloading on the input side of government which has also contributed to political stability and to the maintenance of the multi-party-system” (Ibid.77). The state was able to satisfy elite demands and to some extent mass demands. Thus “the government [of Botswana] has managed to spread the benefits of [mineral led] growth widely enough to keep the population reasonably satisfied” (UNDP, 1998:48). Riley asserts that Botswana possesses some unique features that are lacking in much of contemporary Africa. These features include amongst others “political stability, sustained high economic growth rates whose benefits are reasonably spread, a relatively unified elite committed to foreign investment and maintaining public integrity” (2000:153). Even then, without a “conscious and disciplined leadership, no amount of diamond revenues would have been sufficient to make Botswana an African miracle” (Samatar, 1999:188). In this way, it is difficult to appreciate how this miracle was generated without

understanding the critical role performed by the leadership (Samatar, 1999). Yet, there are other countries such as Lesotho and Swaziland with tiny populations just like Botswana yet their record is not a good one.

Botswana has also ensured a relatively good economic and political management since independence. Wiseman (1995) emphasizes good policy choices and a state formation that was not wasteful. As a result, corruption and patronage have not been at the heart of Botswana politics because it has ensured low levels of corruption. Good management did not only limit corruption but also limited patronage and clientelism. For example, in most African states the public service is used, as a major source of patronage and this is not the case in Botswana because entrance into the public service is mainly based on qualification and merit. “As in other developmental states, the bureaucracy in Botswana is recruited, and promoted on the basis of merit” (Tsie, 1998:13). This is not to say the public service in Botswana is free of patronage especially with regard to senior appointments and in devising policies that favoured the ruling elite. Third, reasonable levels of corruption in Botswana are attributed to the nature of the ruling elite that assumed power at independence (Holm and Molutsi, 1992). They were relatively wealthy even before assuming power because they were engaged in cattle production. And as such “this class did not necessarily see the state as a source of self-enrichment” (Tsie, 1998:13). Therefore, rising to power was not a means of attaining wealth but to gain influence. This is not to suggest that the ruling elite did not benefit from state resources.

The Botswana state is not only led by a committed elite but it has also avoided some of the problems such as corruption that other post-colonial African states suffered from. That is, the importance of the state, the pressure for public resources to be distributed and clientelism have not created corruption that is out of control in Botswana. It is in this sense that Botswana is regarded as the least corrupt country in Africa by Transparency International for 13 years in a row. This makes it one of the most transparent countries in Africa (Transparency International 2008). Botswana’s ability to manage corruption has also been supported by other institutions such as the Mo Ibrahim Index of African

Governance as well as the Worldwide Governance indicators of the World Bank, amongst others.

Botswana's democracy rests on Tswana democratic traditions or principles especially those of consultation, participation and consensus. It is a democracy adapted to local conditions whereby traditional values have a lot of influence on modern institutions. In fact, the country's ability to integrate traditional and modern values partly explains why its democratic experiment is relatively successful. The blending of traditional and modern principles extends to issues of leadership and succession to the presidency. Maundeni (2005:92) observed that succession in Botswana "shows continuities with the ancient Tswana rules governing chieftaincy succession" where the citizens have no say in electing the president. In terms of Tswana tradition, a chief is born and not made. This has ensured that succession in Botswana (within the same party) remains smooth from Sir Seretse Khama, Ketumile Masire, Festus Mogae, and now Lt General Ian Khama. Moreover, political competition has not generated into spoils politics that damaged African states. It is in this context that Robert Rotberg (Undated: 29) classifies Botswana as a "the paragon of leadership excellence in Africa". It is this relatively good leaders and leadership that in one way or the other transformed Botswana. Thus, Rotberg (Undated) concludes that Africa suffers from a "leadership deficit".

A combination of the forgoing factors, directly or indirectly, facilitated the success of the Botswana miracle. They ensured that the country uses its mineral wealth to invest in infrastructural development and provision of social services such as health, education, clean water and road networks. In this way, Botswana is an example of a country that has used its mineral wealth to facilitate and ensure development. It also shows that governance can deliver development notwithstanding the challenges the country faces.

Challenges to the Image of the Botswana Miracle

There is no doubt that Botswana presents a relatively successful case of democratic development. It sparkles in a continent that is largely afflicted by misery. However, Botswana's success is clouded by among others the persistence of poverty,

unemployment, inequality, lack of economic diversification, citizen economic empowerment, the challenge of HIV/AIDS and the strong executive presidency. After many years of sustained and uninterrupted economic growth, poverty is still present in Botswana. Currently, about 47 % of the population is believed to live below the national poverty line (Hillbom, 2008: 206). However, although this percentage is unacceptable in view of many years of economic growth and the country's small population, it cannot be denied that a lot has been achieved relative to other African countries and the extent of poverty at independence. The economy has also not been able to generate enough employment opportunities. Unemployment is currently estimated at 23.8 % although some unofficial reports think it is higher than this (CIA, 2008). This has to do with the fact that mining is technology rather than labor intensive. Despite its large contribution to the GDP, mining constitutes less than 5 % of formal sector employment (UNDP, 2005: 15). This is an anomaly in that the leading sector of the economy contributes very little to formal employment in the country. However, it should be noted that mining indirectly contributes to formal employment in the country. This is because mining contributes a large proportion of government revenue and government is the leading employer in the country. The impressive economic development generated by Botswana's resource wealth is also dented by the inequitable distribution of the fruits of growth. While everyone benefitted one way or another, the rising economic inequalities suggest some have benefited more than others. This inequality is demonstrated by the country's gini index of about 60.5 (UNDP: 2007/8). This economic inequality should perhaps be given urgent attention lest it threatens the country's political stability in the future.

Botswana's other challenge is the over reliance on mining, diamonds in particular. Mining, accounts for about a third of the country's GDP, about 80 % of exports and about 50 % of government revenues (UNDP, 2005:15). Economic diversification has however been government's priority over the years. Beside deliberate attempts to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the government of Botswana has passed various financial credit schemes to provide assistance to both local and international investors. However much of these attempts at economic diversification have not been very successful as investors choose to invest elsewhere, while those who came either relocated later or their

businesses collapsed. Among others, this has to do with the country's landlocked geographical location making transport costs very high (Hillbom, 2008:201) and the country's small domestic market as a result of its small population and sparse distribution of the country's population (UNDP, 2005:18). Government has however not given up because economic diversification remains a priority. Another priority is citizen economic empowerment. Several policies have been passed by government in the past. Currently, one such policy is the Citizen Development Entrepreneurial Agency (CEDA). Passed in 2001, CEDA finances citizen businesses in all sectors of the economy by providing subsidized loans to citizens of Botswana (Siphambe, 2006:61).

HIV/Aids constitute another challenge to Botswana. HIV/Aids prevalence is estimated at 23.9 % in the productive age group of 15-49 (UNAIDS, 2008). The government's response to HIV/Aids has however been among the most radical in Africa. Under the leadership of Festus Mogae (1998-2008) which made HIV/Aids a priority, Botswana became the first country in Africa to provide free anti-retrovirals (ARV's) to all citizens in need of them. By 2007, 90% of HIV patients had access to ARV's, while government also provide free treatment to prevent the transmission of HIV from pregnant women to their unborn babies (UNAIDS, 2008: 283). Moreover, government provides free HIV/Aids testing and also takes care of HIV/Aids orphans (ibid).

The treatment of minorities, the San/Basarwa in particular has also put Botswana under spotlight, especially in recent years. In 2003, the Basarwa took the government of Botswana to court contesting their forced relocation from their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) to some villages or settlements outside the reserve. The issue has however been peacefully resolved. In late 2006, the Lobatse High Court ruled in favour of the Basarwa, thus allowing those who wanted to return to the reserve.

Botswana also has an excessively powerful, though un-popularly elected executive president. Section 47 (1) and (2) of the country's constitution states that "the executive power of Botswana shall vest in the president...who shall unless if provided act in his

own deliberate judgment and shall not be obliged to follow the advise tendered by any other person or authority”. These excessive presidential powers overshadows parliament whose powers are limited mainly to the making of laws governing the country. Section 86 of the country’s constitution states that “parliament has power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Botswana”. To some extent, this excludes parliament from important governmental decision making processes such as conclusion of international treaties and appointment and removal of top state officers such as Ombudsman, director of the anti-corruption institution, secretary of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the country’s ambassadors. However, it is worth mentioning that all the presidents the country has had so far have shown some reluctance to make use of all their constitutional powers. They have instead continued to consult on most issues of national concern.

This presidential supremacy is also made possible to a large extent by the one party dominance and fragmentation of the political opposition that characterize Botswana. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has been in power since independence in 1966. It has also always had an absolute majority in parliament for all these years. The opposition has since independence performed badly because of a number of factors. Due to its fragmentation, the opposition is weak and has dismally failed to present itself as an alternative to a ruling party (BDP) that has generally performed well since independence. Even at the time when the BDP was seriously divided into two well known factions, the opposition failed to take advantage of this. The fragmentation has not only weakened the opposition, it has also led to vote splitting and thus loss of some constituencies that it would easily win if it was not fragmented (Somolekae, 2005: 6). The opposition parties are not only fragmented, they are also poorly organized and their structures lie dormant most of the times (ibid, 28). It generally lacks good leadership and resources to mount a successful challenge to the ruling party (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie, 2006: 40-43). It has also probably been in the cold for a long time, leading to deep seated frustrations. But the weak opposition is a danger to the country’s democracy. It fails to give the people a better alternative to the ruling BDP. Secondly, its weakness in parliament weakens

horizontal accountability over the executive, and thus the quality of the country's democracy as well.

Conclusion

Indeed, Botswana has lessons for other African countries. Forty-two years later, Botswana has emerged differently from most African countries in a continent known for its economic, political and social crises. Thus, it is not only different but it has also kept itself apart from much of Africa by transforming itself into a successful case of democratic development.

In this way, African countries can learn a lot from Botswana notwithstanding its challenges and shortcomings. First, is the importance of democracy and good leadership in development. Although some other African countries are endowed with natural resources, some even more endowed than Botswana, they have not been able to use such resources for national development. This is largely because of poor leadership and contempt for democratic rule. Under good leadership and proper management, natural resources can perform miracles. Botswana is evidence for this. Despite some limitations, everyone the majority of people are better off than they were before the discovery of minerals in the country. Rather than misery and bloodshed, minerals have brought positive development to Botswana.

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