

Botswana's Ipelegeng Programme as a Strategy for Employment Creation for Vulnerable Groups: A Model for Africa?

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1. Introduction

Unemployment is a major cause for concern especially among the poor in Africa. Many yearn for an opportunity to work, if given a chance, but on the continent employment opportunities continue to be at a premium. Many governments in Africa have found it difficult to create an environment conducive for attracting FDI, meaning opportunities continue to be limited. Commentators have explained that the environment has been further poisoned by a host of other factors, including globalisation, which has seen transnational corporations squeezing out local small business ventures, thus throwing many employees into the streets. To add to the woes, education institutions on the continent continue to churn out thousands graduates whose prospects for employment are virtually zero, thus in the process swelling the figures of the unemployed. Many governments on the continent seem to be at a loss as to how this challenge can be tackled. However, a few governments on the continent have come up with innovative strategies for employment creation, which include promotion of a novel version of public works programmes. The Government of Botswana has over the years promoted an initiative called the Ipelegeng Programme.

2. Rate of Unemployment in Botswana.

For most of the 1990s, and early 2000s, unemployment in Botswana was estimated at between 20 and 23%, after which it fell to 17.6 around 2005. Statistics Botswana (2011) reported that as at 2011 the average unemployment rate stood at 17.8%, which translated to 126, 349 unemployed persons, out of a labour force of 710, 600, and a national population of 2.1 million people. At that time female unemployment stood at 21.4% compared to 14.5% for their male counterparts. Generally unemployment rates were higher in rural areas and also for women. Thus unemployment has indeed been an issue of considerable concern in the case of Botswana. Hence the government had to do something about this issue of national concern. That saw the launching of the Ipelegeng Programme. The Ipelegeng Programme has seen many unemployed people getting an opportunity to work and receive a wage. This paper

considers the role that Botswana's Ipelegeng programme has played in employment generation in Botswana, and the contribution that this initiative has made towards social protection in the country.

3. The Concept of Ipelegeng

The term Ipelegeng is vernacular and its literal translation means “*carry your own weight*”, suggesting the cherished notion of self-reliance. In the 1960s and 1970s, the initiative operated as a food for work programme which mostly focused on drought relief. Apparently, the programme in its present format was ‘launched’ in 2008 through a directive from the Office of the President (CAB 19 (A) /2008). The directive indicated that henceforth the initiative would become a permanent, continuous Labour Intensive Public Works programme (NDP 10 2009 – 2016). Suffice it to mention that the directive concerned did not alter the original format; on the contrary it simply expanded the mandate and structure with respect to resource allocation (Nthomang, 2018).

In 1982, wage payments were introduced for the first time, and this made the Ipelegeng programme more attractive and respectable, although, according to observers, this move also helped in terms of reducing food storage costs for the drought relief programme (Nthomang, 2018). The Ipelegeng programme sought to create employment, improve incomes and quality of life of vulnerable groups both in rural and urban areas of Botswana. According to BIDPA (1997) the initiative was meant to provide only short-term employment support and relief, while at the same time promoting development projects in the communities. BIDPA (1997) further explained that the wages in this programme were set to be low enough to be able to increase job opportunities for a majority. The low wages also helped minimise potential conflict with agricultural activities and employment.

4. Implementation of Ipelegeng

This nationwide government sponsored programme targets unskilled and semi-skilled labour, and it is envisaged as a source of supplementary income (Mupedziswa and Ntseane 2012; 2013). The Ministry of Local Government Development Planning and Community Development has responsibility for rolling out of this programme, with local level implementation being left to local authorities, namely rural district and urban councils. Applications for employment are launched through Village Development Committees (VDC)

in the case of rural areas and Ward Development Committees (WDC) in the case of urban areas.

Activities include carrying out essential development work such as collecting of litter, cleaning streets, cutting of grass, carrying out minor construction work, clearing of fields, maintenance of drift fences, community policing, maintenance of buildings and secondary roads (Mupedziswa and Ntseane, 2012; 2013). According to the Ministry of Local Government (2010) an estimated 19431 people benefitted from the programme in 2010, compared to 14 363 in 2008. At the time the wage rates were pegged at P18/day for casual labourers and P24/day for their supervisors. It should be noted that since 2012/13 beneficiaries now receive a meal at a cost of P5 per day, and this seems to work as some kind of incentive. This also ensures workers have energy to work.

According to Nthomang (2018) records show that as at May 2013 some 56 274 people, 71% of which were female, were working on the Ipelegeng programme across the country. During that period beneficiaries were earning P 480 (approx. \$45) per month. To this should be added P100 (i.e. the P5 per meal for food), making a total wage of P580 per month. Resources for the Ipelegeng programme are allocated, not by district but based on the size of the Parliamentary Constituency. At the time of writing, the country had a total of 57 Parliamentary constituencies, and each of the constituencies received a determined monthly (money) disbursement from the Ministry of Local Government.

5. Challenges faced

Implementation of the Ipelegeng Programme has not been without its fair share of challenges. It has been argued that coverage has been rather limited, essentially due to resource scarcity. Botswana's resource base, despite the country's upper middle income status, is limited. While expenditure for the programme rose from P301 million in 2011/12 to P409 million in 2012/13, the amount still fell short of demand. In several constituencies demand has consistently far outstripped available resources, with some officials being forced to resort to employing the lottery system in the selection process (Nthomang, 2018). By some accounts the programme has benefitted between 50 000 and 56 000 aged 18 – 64 years (per month) over the years. This is against a figure of over 300 000 very poor people across the country. Concern has also been expressed to the effect that in some cases the deserving poor have not benefitted as they have fallen through the cracks due to implementation challenges which

include poor targeting. Some actually say the better off have benefitted at the expense of the poorest of the poor (WB & BIDPA, 2013).

6. Conclusion

Despite these challenges, the programme has benefitted many among the vulnerable in Botswana. Ordinary people appreciate being able to earn an income, though small. Some have used the earnings (as start-up capital) to start more viable income generating projects. The paper argues that while the programme has a number of short comings; its positives far out-weigh its negatives, meaning it has helped change people's lives. For this reason the Ipelegeng Programme initiative in Botswana can arguably serve as a model for the continent of Africa.

7. References

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