



**THE FUTURE OF TRADE UNIONISM IN AFRICA: CASE OF
BOTSWANA**

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Introduction

- The main mandate of trade unions is to improve the lives of its people.
- The employer and employees have different interests which both must be taken care of in a mutually beneficial manner.
- The union acts as the gate keeper of the employee interests which then improved working conditions for the employer.
- The relevance and future of trade unions it's intertwined to its ability to carry out its mandate successfully.

- As trade unions keep losing members, their strength is weakened because the strength of a trade union is its numbers.
- Where there are strong unions, members can enjoy good working environments and with societies.
- This paper will assess the relevance of trade unions from inception right into the 21st century so as to have a better indication of what the future holds for trade unions.

Background

- Botswana just like other countries have T/U whose interests are protecting the interests of the employees to ensure that they are not violated in pursuit of the employers' interests.
- However, in the 21st century the growth and relevance of trade union has been staggered and reduced significantly with trade unions facing challenges like:
 - internal feud,
 - lack of recognition from employers, and
 - lack of cooperation from government.

Problem Statement

- The relationship between employees and employer is inevitably subjected to conflict due to varying interests.
- Due to the varying interests, the relationship between the employers and trade unions has become toxic over the years with the employer employing tactics that seeks to defuse the impact of trade unions to stifle their growth.
- This act has seen a steady decline in the relevance of trade unions right for the post-colonial era
- Equally, Trade unions has played a significant role in the downward spiral of their relevance as they failed to deal with their internal feud

Problem statement continue..

- However, there is very little attention paid to how trade unions have evolved over time in Botswana with specific interest on how the future looks like for trade union in the public and private sector in Botswana.
- Due to the little impact of trade unions in Botswana there has not been much coverage on their work and how they have progressed through the years, with most studies done at a continental level which means coverage of respective countries will be very shallow.
- This then translates to a literature gap on the future of trade unions in Botswana.

Problem statement

- The literature gap that exists on the future of trade unions in Botswana dictates that there should be a wholistic assessment on the current trade unions relevance which will help paint a picture on the future of trade unions in Botswana.
- Although there are studies done on trade unions in Botswana, the studies leave a literature gap in that they do not link the current impact of trade unions to their future.
- It is for this reason that a more comprehensive study is needed to address the knowledge gap.

Significance of the paper

- The research is significant in a bid to assess the future of trade unions in Botswana with a view of establishing threats and making recommendations so that the trade unions remain relevant in future.
- The study will be useful for trade unions and its members to appreciate the relevance of public sector trade unions in the 21st century in Botswana and ways of improving the relevance.
- Furthermore, the study is useful to academicians.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

- The population of the unionized employed workforce in Botswana is very low and it has been on the decline.
- In recent years unions struggled to deal with the challenges, they face thereby bring their relevance into question.
- According to FUS (2008) the density of trade union membership in Botswana is still low and over the last few years it has reached new low levels as people lose faith in their ability to hold the employers accountable.

The relationship between State and Trade Unions

- The relationship between trade unions and the state in Botswana is historically a toxic one, with the government and employers electing to play a big brother role in issues of industrial relations.
- In the public sector government employed tight controls that seek to stifle the impact of trade unions (Maipose, 2003).
- Mogalakwe (2007) shares these sentiments by submitting that ever since 1969 the government has exercised robust control majors on unions to limit their growth and impact by using legislations that hands power to the government in their dealing with trade unions.

- The laws of Botswana do not allow the unions without permission from government; this means that strikes must be authorized by government.
- This takes away the power from the trade unions and puts them at the mercy of the government.
- This drives home the uncertainty that surrounds trade unions in Botswana with the majority falling prey to the strict regulations that govern trade unions thereby leading to their failure and deregistration.

Trade Unions and Political Parties in Botswana

- The relationship between unions and political parties in Botswana is not the healthiest.
- According to FUS (2008) trade unions in Botswana have elected to adopt a passive role in political matters with greater emphasis being placed on issues that directly affect employees.
- This is so even though from the onset trade unions were formed by political stewards.
- The lack of involvement in political matters has often left trade unions on their own when they fight the mighty employer on issues of employee relations.

- This makes trade unions less powerful as they cannot garner necessary support for them to push the employers towards improving the working conditions of the employees.
- The primary mandate of a trade union is to advocate for improved working conditions and as unions fail to advance the interests of the employees against the employer, this results in loss of members and the union facing being deemed irrelevant thereby being susceptible to deregistration.

Trade unions in the 21st Century

- Trade unions in Botswana today are faced with a lot of challenges that have eroded their relevance and painted a dull future about the trade unions.
- In the 21st century trade unions have found it difficult to make any significant impact of the working conditions of its members, which has cast a lot of doubt about the impact of trade unions going forward

- As unions fail to meet their mandates, this inevitably leads to splits which are usually followed by the need to rebuild.
- Botswana is littered with small trade unions which have now switched their focus to competing amongst each other for members.
- In their quest to remain relevant trade unions have reverted to focusing on welfare schemes to attract members.
- This in a way is a concession by trade unions that they have no chance in improving the working conditions of the employees and as such they have resorted to welfare schemes to attract members

- However, the fact that trade unions have since moved to prioritise it is a cause of concern, as this in a way means that they have accepted the peripheral role given by the employer, and as such have resorted to other means of remaining relevant.

Discussions

- The main role of trade unions is to advocate for better working conditions for their members in the workplace.
- This is mainly because of varying interests of the employer and the employees.
- Trade unions in Botswana started in the early colonial era with political activists at the forefront.
- When trade unions started off, they were underestimated by employers and as such they were able to make significant contributions in improving the working conditions of their members.

Findings

- Trade unions in Botswana have found it very difficult to make any significant contribution in helping to improve the working conditions for the employees.
- During the colonial era, the trade unions made good strikes in pushing for better working conditions for their employees.
- The strength of trade unions is heavily linked to the number of members it has.
- As trade unions continue to split it weakens them.
- The employed population in Botswana is very low, no if the same population is spread across many small unions it casts more doubt on the future of trade unions in Botswana which is triggered by the alarming

Recommendations

- Trade unions in Botswana should form or align to one strong trade union.
- Trade unions should manage their internal feud to avoid splits.
- Trade unions are to have a clear mandate to avoid internal conflicts.
- Botswana should make laws that give trade unions more powers and recognition as partners.

- The future of trade unions in Botswana looks bleak, considering incidents that have taken place in the 21st century.
- Internal fights within the unions has also contributed greatly to the demise of the trade unions as this has seen them break into smaller unions that have struggled for members and impact which lead to them being deregistered.
- The paper demonstrated how trade unions in Botswana have failed to deliver on their mandates largely due to the challenges they have faced both internally and externally.
- The paper started off with defining trade unions and moved on in a chronological manner to discuss the future of trade unions in Botswana and also shared recommendations before closing off with a summary of the key points raised.

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