

## **‘A Very Grave and Expensive Error’?: The Legislative Council’s Debate on the Choice of a New Site for the Capital of Botswana, 1961-1965**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the reasons why it was considered appropriate for the capital of Botswana to be re-located in Gaborone from its administrative enclave in Mahikeng (in South Africa) where it had been for seventy years. It further discusses arguments for and against, by members of the then newly formed Legislative Council (Legco) regarding the exact location of the capital of the soon to be independent state. The paper then examines reasons advanced for the decision for the choice of Gaborone among other places as the site of the capital. Finally, the paper takes the view that despite the circumstances of the time which dictated that the final decision be to settle the capital in Gaborone, this was nevertheless a grave and expensive error. Although the decision was arrived at democratically with the support of the overwhelming majority of Legco members, it should be noted that the majority is not always right! In this case the minority seems to have had better foresight.

### **Introduction**

The background to the location of Botswana’s administrative centres in South Africa is a subject of other works (Mgadla 2016; Dale 1969 and Sillery 1965) and here the paper goes straight into the Legco debates on the relocation of the site in Botswana. It would appear that sites for new capital towns are determined by very basic but fundamental considerations. Foremost is the availability or abundance of water supplies. In addition, there ought to be the availability of plenty of land. A new capital should also consider the centrality of the site to the extent possible, so that it is accessible to most, if not all sectors of the population. There should also be communication networks that link the population with the capital. Such communication networks could be roads, railways, airports, and harbours for those countries with coastal areas and or navigable rivers. Old capitals that have been faced with overcrowding, land shortage, and a lack of central location have had to be relocated to new areas at expensive costs. In their movement, they have had to take into account some of the above mentioned considerations. A few examples on the continent and the Southern African region would suffice.

In Nigeria for instance, because the old capital Lagos did not meet some of the criteria mentioned above, a new capital had to be established in Abuja in 1991 (Abubakar 2015). In addition to the criteria outlined above, Abuja was seen as a neutral site for Nigeria’s many ethnic groups (Jiriko *et al* 2015). In 1973, Tanzania also moved its capital city from Dar-es-Salaam on the coast to Dodoma, a place considered more central and accessible to most of the population and with abundance of land, for both settlement and agricultural purposes. It also had a railway line built during colonial times linking it with the city of Dar-es-Salaam. The city was built more to suit President Julius Nyerere’s ideology of Ujamaa where the settlement would encompass villagers who would build their settlements according to their traditions as well as working together in their agricultural lands (Duncan 2015). Closer to Botswana, Livingstone was the capital of Zambia before it moved to Lusaka which began as a railway siding connecting with the copper mines in the country’s Copper Belt (Meyers 2006). Lusaka was centrally located as opposed to Livingstone whose location is in the southern part of the country. Lusaka also had good underground water and adequate land (Chitonge and Mfuno 2015).

The new site for the capital of Botswana did not deviate so much from these norms. Indeed, the terms of reference given to the colonial administration’s appointed investigating committee made it abundantly

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clear that in its feasibility study, it should take into account the *availability of an abundance of water supplies*, plenty of land, access to the density of the population, centrality, communication and proximity to an established centre with humble buildings (Bechuanaland Protectorate nd). The terms of reference further directed that both northern and southern sites be considered and that a balance for centrality be explored. The selected site also had to be amenable to both African and European interests, and, that the planned site for the capital be for a population of 5,000 initially and 25,000 in 20 years' time. Finally, the terms of reference indicated in most emphatic terms that the overriding factor be *the adequacy of water supplies*.

By the early 1960s, the British government was prepared to support the move of the administration centre to a site inside Botswana. It, therefore, put it to the administration and leadership of Botswana to find a suitable site for the location of a new administrative and legislative centre. Some *dikgosi* (chiefs) approached 'the government offering land in any one of the tribal territories which might be considered suitable for the Headquarters' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961). However, the offer was not taken by the government for reasons not advanced.

### **The Government Investigating Committee on a Suitable Site**

Since the territory was known for its poverty and dependence on grants-in-aid from Britain, the latter supported the move with two important assets necessary to facilitate the establishment of the new capital. Firstly, it estimated and pledged money to the amount of four million Rand to help in the movement of the 'capital' (*Kutlwano* 1964). Secondly, it provided a committee of government experts or those it hired to lead in the fact finding mission regarding the decision to locate an appropriate site for the new capital. The committee consisted of the Government Secretary, an official from the Public Works Department, and a hired consultant in the form of a water expert and hydraulic engineer Professor DC Midgley from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961).

Armed with these terms of reference, the investing committee of experts travelled throughout the territory from the north to the south, mostly along the railway line. A total of nine sites were considered namely: Lobatse, Manyana, Gaborone, Bokaa/Pilane, Dibete, Mahalapye, Tuli Block, Shashi and Francistown. Each of these potential sites was closely examined to determine its suitability or the lack of it. Lobatse, in the southern part of the country had the deceptive advantage of hosting Legco sessions. Moreover, both the African and European Advisory Councils had previously argued for Lobatse to be the future headquarters of the territory. However, Lobatse was found unsuitable for several reasons. Although endowed with relatively good climate and beautiful scenery, Lobatse's failure to qualify as the future capital of Botswana stemmed from its inadequacy of water supplies and the fact that it was not seen as central in relation to the rest of the country (Bechuanaland Protectorate nd). Furthermore, the availability of crown land or state land for expansion was found to be limited with most of the land around it being owned by individual farmers.

Manyana, Shashi, Bokaa/Pilane Mahalapye and Dibete fell short of meeting the requirements primarily because they did not have enough water supplies and lacked in existing infrastructural developments. The Tuli Block, tucked far away in the eastern panhandle, was found to have no communication networks, especially a railway line which was the major means of communication at the time. It was also considered remote in relation to the rest of the country. Francistown in the north had the advantage of being the only northern town that was both commercial and a small 'industrial' base. However, it did not make the grade either. Adequate water supplies could not be guaranteed because the technical services indicated that large scale water projects would take investigators up to five years to conclude with any degree of certainty (Bechuanaland Protectorate nd). Francistown also had problems of land which, however, was owned by the Tati Company, and therefore rendering it not easily affordable.

It would appear that neither the members of the Legco nor the administration itself were prepared to wait for that long. In addition, the cost implications of such investigations were prohibitive. It was feared that with the British government having pledged R4 million for the movement of the capital for that year, it could be used elsewhere if the decision on a new capital was unduly delayed.

### **The Choice of Gaborone for Site of a New Capital**

The investigating committee finally settled for Gaborone (then called Gaborones) because of a variety of factors. Top amongst these was the availability of water in the area. Extensive water explorations had been undertaken in all the nine sites that were identified and the Notwane River was found to have plenty of water to sustain the new capital. Ironically, in 1895 Gaborone had been dismissed as a potential capital because it did not have sufficient water supplies (Mgadla 2016). To ascertain the availability of water, an expert was engaged by the administration to conduct a water survey. The investigating committee's water expert Professor D.C. Midgely was able to locate water supplies along the Notwane River where a dam could be built five miles from the site of the capital (Steel 1969). The dam was subsequently built in 1963 and completed in 1965 with a capacity of nine million gallons of water per year.

Although most of the land in Botswana belonged to various ethnic groups, it was thought that Gaborone, despite being adjacent to the Batlokwa, had sufficient crown land (Grant 2013). This land could be used by the state and developed according to the needs of the capital. The investigating committee, administration, and indeed members of Legco did not want the capital situated in the territory of any one particular group although the *dikgosi* had offered part of their lands (Bechuanaland 1961).

The next factor took into account the availability of infrastructural buildings and communications. Gaborone used to be the headquarters for the assistant commissioner for the southern part of the territory, hence it had some humble buildings. During the South African War (1899-1902 and the subsequent siege of Mahikeng, Fort Gaborone served as seat of administration for the British. So, it had several infrastructural developments like branches of the police, Public Works Department and a prison. It also had some administrative buildings, running water, a post office, a hotel, and a railway (Grant 2011). In addition, there were other determining factors that persuaded the investigating committee to settle for Gaborone. These included centrality, accessibility, and population density. The terms of reference did mention centrality *to the extent possible*, as well as accessibility to most inhabitants of the country. Gaborone was found to be accessible to six of the eight 'principal' Tswana-speaking ethnic groups in the southern part of the territory namely, Barolong, Balete, Batlokwa, Bakgatla, Bangwaketse and Bakwena. The Bangwato, some 300 kms away in the north, were said to be near enough (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961). By virtue of the location of the 'principal' groups, and by extension, their relation to population, it was thought that most of the population was in the south and, therefore, Gaborone was central and accessible to most of the population.

Finally, indirect but related factors to the location of Gaborone were time and funds. As already indicated above, the British government had pledged R4 million to assist in the relocation from Mahikeng to Gaborone. It had also made it clear that as soon as a site for the capital had been decided upon, the funds would be disbursed. Therefore, the colonial administration in Botswana and the members of Legco were under immense pressure to reach a consensus on the site of the capital at the earliest possible time. Taking too long to reach a decision either by undertaking expensive and complicated water explorations did not guarantee that the British government would withhold its financial pledge indefinitely.

As would be expected, the decision to locate the capital in Gaborone was not without controversy. It elicited an interesting debate from members of Legco with some supporting and others opposing it. Commenting on the recommendations of the investigating committee, Resident Commissioner Peter Fawcus said that 'The conclusions and reasons why the Committee reached these conclusions are clearly set out in the White Paper before honourable members. This does not imply that Government has fixed

on Gaborones as the site for the Head Quarters, as Government considers the choice of sites for the Head Quarters is a matter on which the people of the territory, through this Council, should exercise a major influence... so as to facilitate the fullest possible discussion... on any alternative sites to Gaborones that may be proposed by honourable members' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:6). The words of the Resident Commissioner set the debate on. Indeed, a healthy and democratic exercise that set the pace for the future governance of the country was employed.

### **Arguments against the Site of Gaborone**

Once the investigating committee had concluded its feasibility study, it made recommendations to the administration which it passed on to the newly founded Legco to deliberate on fully and decide on the location of the new capital. At every stage the British government was abreast of the developments. It is here that it became apparent that the local inhabitants were not all in unison as some regarded the exercise purely a government one, and in which government did not consult with the local inhabitants on the issue. Some members of Legco even expressed doubt as to whether such a committee could be trusted. For instance, a European member by the name Hendrik van Gass requested assurance that the committee had fully considered every site suggested for the location of the capital. 'We do not want any misunderstanding, we want to feel that they went into this proposition thoroughly. Was enough time allowed to investigate and prove the water facilities of each site –the cost supplies for each site?' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:17).

Opposing Gaborone as the site for the capital, van Gass drew the attention of Legco to a report of the Economic Survey of the Okavango waters which suggested that the water could be 'brought down to Lake Dow and from there pumped to the Shashi and Lotsani Rivers and across to Francistown, and Palapye'. If that was done, argued van Gass, then there would be more than enough water to build a capital and even provide more latitude on the decision for the centrality of the capital. In his view a central place would be anywhere between Mahalapye, Serowe, and Palapye (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:30).

The non-consultation of the inhabitants of the Botswana in the exercise was voiced by the Legco member Jimmy Haskins. He tabled a motion seeking endorsement for a committee representing the Legco to undertake its own investigations rather than depend on the government's instituted committee. 'No decision shall be taken concerning the site of the new administrative and legislative head-quarters of the Bechuanaland Protectorate until it has been further investigated by a Select Committee of this House who will pay particular attention to the wishes of the people of the Territory' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:12). Haskins doubted the accuracy of the Government's investigating committee's findings, and felt that it would have been more credible had the committee involved some members of Legco who represented the people of the territory. As far as he was concerned, the colonial government had let the people of Botswana down! He blamed the administration of missing what he termed 'a golden opportunity of obtaining free and extremely valuable and sound advice' from inhabitants who had more knowledge and practical experience of the territory than the government officials.

GP Taylor, who was a nominated member of Legco, supported Haskins on the issue of consultation. His argument was that the matter was of immense magnitude that it needed much consultation of as many responsible people in the territory as possible. Taylor preferred that the consultation should have also included people outside the government committee and even Legco. In supporting Haskins, Taylor suggested to the government that 'no stone was to be left unturned before the final decision was to be taken' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:16). Taylor made it clear that the choice of the capital should have a bearing on the future prosperity of the country. His argument was that the future of Botswana lay in the north rather than in the south of the country because the north had more water than the south. He believed that the future industrial development of Botswana would be found mostly in the north.

Taylor also argued that the bulk of the population was not found among the six ethnic groups in

the south as believed by some, but it was in the north, and that it was 'likely to remain that way in the foreseeable future' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1960:36). Taylor's suggestion was that the capital should be in the areas of the Bangwato and Tati territories but adjacent to the Shashe River. Land could be negotiated with the Bangwato and the Tati Company. He further argued that that could be closer to the necessary infrastructure in Francistown. His view was that even if further investigations could cause a delay for the location of the capital, it was worthwhile, considering the magnitude of the matter than a rush that would result in a possible miscalculation.

LJ Mynhardt also supported Haskins and indicated that he preferred Francistown over Gaborone because the former was the main commercial and industrial center of the territory. He also cited its accessibility to main areas such as Ngamiland, Nata, Kasane, and Bangwato tribal territory (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:43). He also mentioned other advantages such the availability of an international airport, railway and road networks, space for expansion and several humble buildings. He further said Francistown also had an abundance of water supplies surpassed only by the Ngamiland and Chobe areas. He even went further to suggest that if Francistown was found unsuitable for whatever reason, the alternative could be Shashe which the investigating committee had considered. Mynhardt concluded his submission by asking a pertinent but rhetorical question, 'How can they be so sure of their water in Gaborone?' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:44).

Another skeptical councilor was MTCP Shaw who premised his comments on a somewhat prophetic question. He quizzed, 'Are we going to make another move 50 years from now? Gaborone is too far south and I am sure it will prove to be unsuitable in years to come. What will happen if the Republican [South African] government decides to build dams on their side of the Notwani River and cut off our source of supply?' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1960:37). He accused the investigating committee of imposing its findings on Legco and expecting it to rubber stamp the recommendations. He implored the house to freely debate the issue on the location for the capital because if Gaborone was found to be the wrong site 'then we will do our best to see that we do not make a very grave and expensive error'. Shaw also argued that Gaborone was not in the centre of the country contrary to the findings of the investigating committee. As far as he was concerned, the few advantages Gaborone had could not outweigh its disadvantages. Shaw further made prophetic observations by stating that in 50 years' time (which is 2016) Gaborone would not be able to expand to west nor to the east, north or south because the land was occupied by four of the 'principal' ethnic groups. This was ironic because one of the recommendations of the investigating committee was that the site of Gaborone was in close proximity of most of the principal tribes. His prediction was that the six ethnic groups would become a barrier to the expansion of Gaborone to any direction.

### **Arguments in Support of the Site of Gaborone**

The membership of Legco was not all in unison regarding the motion tabled by Haskins. Indeed, many opposed the motion. The view of most members was that even though they were not part of the investigating Committee *per se*, the administration had brought the findings and recommendations of its Committee to Legco for deliberation with a view to either endorsing or rejecting them. For its part, the administration had made it abundantly clear that Legco had to own the decision of the site of the capital as it represented the aspirations and views of the inhabitants of the territory. To that end, the Resident Commissioner Peter Fawcus, emphasized that 'the government considers that the choice of the sites for the Headquarters is a matter on which the people of the territory through its Council, should exercise a major influence. It is for that reason that... the debate on this question... [should] facilitate the fullest possible discussion... on any alternative sites to Gaborone that may be proposed by honourable member' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:6).

Seretse Khama supported the administration's position. He also believed that the *dikgosi*, another

group representing various ethnic groups in the territory, had met with the administration's officials on the issue. In short, Seretse believed that a measure of consultation had taken place with some representatives of the inhabitants. 'I do recall that at one stage the Chiefs of the Protectorate met the Resident Commissioner, and again also, that the decision rests entirely with us, because as we are here, we represent the people and nobody else. I am quite certain that when we consider the siting, we shall disregard all personal interests. We shall only have in mind those things which we know are in fact in the interests of the whole country as such and of the people who live in it', argued Seretse (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:9). Unlike other members of Legco, Seretse had no problems with the composition of the government-appointed committee especially that Legco had the final say in the location of the capital. He argued that it had more technical experts than the members of the Legco. 'I personally would hate to debate this motion all over again, knowing that whether we put it off or whether we give it to someone else, ultimately we still have to make a decision. Nobody is more acquainted with this country than we are. From the technical side we have all the technical information that we require.... Your Honour, I think that the preliminary, the essential investigations have been made. We have the information before us from experts' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:9). While Seretse admitted that Gaborone may not have been the most central site it, nonetheless, it had several advantages. He pointed out that the six of the eight 'principal' tribes were around Gaborone. He also stressed the availability of water in Gaborone as a critical factor.

Several councillors supported Seretse Khama. Among these was Russell England who urged members not to employ delaying tactics which might delay the building of the new capital citing in particular the financial aspect. Quett Masire followed suit and emphasized unity and the interests of the country and discouraging personal interests that were likely to divide the country. Masire also commended the administration and its investigating committee for being proactive in the selection of a site for the new capital (Masire 2006). Kgosi Bathoen II of the Bangwaketse also pointed out the advantages of Gaborone in the form of some infrastructure which used to be the residence for the assistant commissioner. 'All taxes that were collected in the Bechuanaland Protectorate were sent there including all appeal cases. Meetings of the tribes with important members of the government such as the High Commissioner and the like were held in Gaborone.... We looked on Gaborone as a semi-capital of the Bechuanaland Protectorate', he observed (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:49). He also said that Gaborone had been the deputy capital for a long time and wondered why it could not be elevated to being a substantive capital as it already had some departments of the government. He also dismissed Francistown as unsuitable citing the lack of land saying that land there belonged to the private Tati Company. Kgosi Bathoen II concluded his deliberations by stating that he had previously thought Lobatse would be the new capital but since the deliberations on the issue he had changed his mind in favour of Gaborone.

Job Gugushe expressed confidence in the government's team of experts. 'I have always taken the point that we rely on our government and its officials and its technicians and if from their technical knowledge they tell us that water, the most important thing, is available at Gaborone, we then have no grounds why we should doubt that information from them' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:19). Dr Alfred Merriweather also backed both Seretse and Gugushe. Merriweather believed that a government White Paper prepared at the recommendation of the technical team was excellent because it had been prepared by experts from a scientific and technical point of view. He stated that these were 'men who are quite unbiased in their own outlook' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:19). The medical doctor argued that the paper covered all aspects of the question and that their recommendations were made after they had considered most places. He noted also that 'From a purely scientific and technical view point it would, Your Honour, it would be rash of us as a Council, to disregard that and say that we can do better or that we know a better place. It would be even more rash of us I think, to form a Select Committee and to send this matter back to the people of the country. The people of the country whether they are African or European have

very limited knowledge of this type of thing. They have not the scientific and technical knowledge of those who wrote the White Paper' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:25).

Councilors such as Goareng Mosinyi, Leetile Raditladi, Kgosi Mokgosi of the Balete, George Sim, Tsheko Tsheko, and M. Maribe all argued for the capital to be in Gaborone. Perhaps, Sim who had lived around Gaborone since 1913, added a persuasive voice in favour of Gaborone. He noted that the development of industries and establishment of a new capital depended to a very large extent, on the amount of water available and communications (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961). Sim also observed that ideally, Ngamiland and the Limpopo River would have been suitable for a capital, but owing to a lack of communication through a railway, and centrality, both options were not tenable. He spoke highly of the Notwane River as having a 'vast net-work of tributaries'. He also said in 1945 a water survey from the area around Ramotswa in the Balete tribal territory through Gaborone to the Bakgatla territory was carried out by a hydrological engineer from Malaya (Malaysia). The results of the survey according to Sim 'proved the importance of the Gaborone area as a future economic development of this territory' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961:17). Sim also mentioned the Crocodile Pools in the vicinity of the Notwane River. He claimed that during the drought of 1960 one farmer in Crocodile Pools 'watered 400 cattle for months without in any way diminishing the supply, and in the 1933 drought 600 head of cattle were watered by one farmer, including Bakwena cattle, from these pools and there was hardly any noticeable drop in the level of these pools. At this site it is quite possible to have another dam'.

The Kolobeng and Metsimotlhaba Rivers were also mentioned as potential water sources that were not too far from Gaborone. Sim concluded his water knowledge around Gaborone by stating, in most emphatic terms, that Gaborone was the best place for the new capital as its soils were fertile, and had plenty of land for present and future use. With this kind of knowledge and assurance from one of the long time inhabitants, which knowledge complimented that of scientific experts, it was no wonder that most members of Legco were persuaded that Gaborone was the best place for the new capital.

### **Was the Choice of Gaborone 'A Very Grave and Expensive Error'?**

It should be noted that the Legco deliberations were democratic and thorough but protracted. At the end of it all a vote decided that of the 33 members 22 voted for the capital of Botswana to be located in Gaborone while 11 wanted it elsewhere. Looking at the circumstances of the time, what appears to have persuaded the majority of the councilors to opt for Gaborone were several advantages found to exist in Gaborone. First there was a guarantee of 'adequate' water supplies after 'thorough' investigations. Second, there was the availability of crown land which meant that the administration would not have to buy or request land from any of the nearby ethnic groups. Thirdly, there were a few humble infrastructural developments in Gaborone. Fourthly, Gaborone was located not too far from six 'principal' ethnic groups considered to constitute the bulk of the population. Perhaps, it is possible that these factors, together with the time available to identify and build a capital as soon as possible, prompted the administration and most Legco councilors to hurriedly settle for Gaborone.

Persuaded by the arguments of the 11 councilors who argued against the site of Gaborone, this paper takes the position that the assertion that the choice of Gaborone was a grave and expensive error was not altogether unfounded. Obviously, the members who opposed the location of Gaborone were in the minority and that being so, were democratically out-voted, but that did not mean that the majority made the 'right' choice. Indeed, the majority is not always right especially in this case, at least on hindsight. A close examination of the factors that led to the establishment of Gaborone as the capital indicates that some of these factors were questionable. Perhaps, at the time these factors were straight forward, but even then some of the members questioned them. It is even worse so on hindsight, or 50 years later.

Prof Midgley's investigations had revealed that there was adequate water in the Notwane dam and some

councilors even believed that some additional dams could be built in and around Gaborone. Upon examining other sites, could it realistically be said that the ‘small’ Notwane River could be found to have had more water than say, the Mahalapye, Shashi or even the Tati Rivers? Councilors Taylor, Shaw, van Gass and others argued that there was more water in the north than in the south. They also predicted that in 50 years’ time the north would supply the south with water.

Another attraction of Gaborone was said to be the availability of crown land. How much crown land was available and what consideration there was for expansion in the future was not immediately clear. The minority councilors did point out that Gaborone as a capital had limited land for expansion, predicting at the time that in the future it would not be able to expand into all four directions without encroaching on tribal lands. Today, 50 years later, that prediction could not have been more on the mark.

The decision to locate the capital in Gaborone was in part influenced by the fact that it was accessible to the six ‘principal’ tribal groups which factor assumed that most of the population of the country was in the southern part of the territory. That assumption appears to have been erroneous as Table 1 below gives a picture of what the population of the south compared to the north had been like from 1964 to 1971.

**Table 1: Population of northern Botswana compared to southern Botswana, 1964 to 1971**

DISTRICT	1964	1971	DIFFERENCE
Francistown	9 521	19 903	+10 382
Barolong	10 883	12 158	+1 275
Central	209 565	234 828	+25 263
Chobe	5 120	5 411	+291
Ngamiland	42 572	53 870	+11 298
North East	25 795	28 524	+2 729
Gaborone	3 855	18 436	+14 581
<i>Lobatse</i>	<i>7 613</i>	<i>12 920</i>	<i>+5 307</i>
<i>Ghanzi</i>	<i>16 366</i>	<i>17 352</i>	<i>+986</i>
<i>Kgalagadi</i>	<i>16 636</i>	<i>17 289</i>	<i>+653</i>
<i>Kgatleng</i>	<i>33 100</i>	<i>35 752</i>	<i>+2 652</i>
<i>Kweneng</i>	<i>74 000</i>	<i>72 093</i>	<i>-1 907</i>
<i>Ngwaketse</i>	<i>72 419</i>	<i>79 152</i>	<i>+6 733</i>
<i>South East</i>	<i>21 031</i>	<i>22 691</i>	<i>+ 1 660</i>
<i>Mafeking</i>	<i>1 034</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-1 034</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>549 510</b>	<b>630 379</b>	<b>+80 869</b>

Source: Botswana National Archive and Records Services: BNB 489, p. 19. \* The italics were added by the author.

Related to the population factor was that the investigating committee’s suggestion that the capital be built for 5,000 people out of a population less than 600,500 people for the whole country. Granted, at the time it could have been appropriate, but 5,000 is an awfully small figure especially that there was no indication or specification that the capital would move any time soon. It is baffling that a capital of any country should be planned around a small figure such as 5,000 as if its population, and that of the country for that matter, would forever remain stagnant. Even before Botswana’s diamond revolution which expedited economic growth in Gaborone which started in the 1980s, by 1976 the population of Gaborone had shot up to 36,000 inhabitants (Makgala and Bolaane 2016).

The claimed infrastructure and communication did not make Gaborone particularly stand out as advantageous compared to Lobatse, Mahalapye and Francistown for example. All the three were accessible by roads and rail. Small commercial and industrial centres were also available in these places. Also

available in all the three places were humble buildings which included police stations and running water. The decision to find an appropriate place for the location of the capital of Botswana appears to have been taken in a rush on the part of both the administration and Legco councilors. In their deliberations about the site of the new capital, member after member talked about the short space of time within which the location of the capital had to be identified.

The apparent 'hurry' was tied to the financial issue. Botswana was known to have been one of the poorest countries in the world, dependent on subsistence farming and agriculture and to a very large extent on the British government's grants-in-aid. It goes without saying, therefore, that by 1964-1965 the country had no money to absorb the expenses of the movement from Mahikeng, let alone build a new capital. Mention has already been made that the British government had pledged R4 million for the relocation of the headquarters into the country. If the administration and the Legco delayed in identifying the 'appropriate' site for the new capital for anything from one to five years, then there was no guarantee that the British government would hold its pledge for that long. Fear of losing that opportunity, compounded by the fact that the relocation of the headquarters was long overdue any way, were in the minds of the administration and Legco councilors. In those circumstances, the possibility of hurriedly making a decision on the site for a new capital could easily lead to miscalculations and 'grave and expensive errors' as some councilors argued.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has demonstrated that the population of the country was not denser in the south because of the location of the six 'principal' ethnic groups, and that the assumption that the population was more in the south was not quite accurate. Shortage of land in Gaborone has seen huge numbers of desperate people scrambling to apply for plots in the neighbouring villages in the Kweneng, Kgatleng, Tlokweng and Gamalete in the recent years! Furthermore, the location of Gaborone could not be said to have been central and, therefore, accessible to the rest of the population. Located in the south eastern part of the country, Gaborone's centrality and accessibility are not conspicuously obvious. The infrastructure and communication lines were available in other places other than Gaborone.

There is no doubt that the whole process regarding the decision to locate the capital was democratic and practical at the time, giving the majority what it preferred. However, it would appear that the minority voice, then, and on hindsight, had a point. Had thorough investigation been undertaken for each site without time limitations, it is debatable whether the capital and its precincts would be having a water crisis it presently is facing. In other words investigations on the availability of water in other places other than Gaborone would appear not to have been as thorough. If in some distant future this country thought of moving its capital, as other countries have done, this should be a lesson.

Fifty years from now it is doubtful whether there would be enough water to cater for the capital and its precincts as the costs of ferrying water would probably quadruple and the population would double if not treble. In the circumstances, the lesson to be learnt from the manner in which the choice of the capital was made is, perhaps, to diversify services and industry so that they are not all concentrated in one place as it appears to be the case today. The services and developments should be such that they are equally distributed to major towns, cities and villages as well. In that way, the population would also be evenly distributed and not concentrated in Gaborone as is presently the case. Perhaps, the country could be taking cue from other countries and have legislative, administrative, judicial and commercial centres in different places so that the majority of the population is not drawn to one place - the capital. In that way, the life blood commodity –water– might not be so scarce.

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