

Former Cabinet Minister Archie Mogwe Still Driving Himself at 94

*Sonny Serite**

At 94, former diplomat and politician Archie Mogwe still looks as fit as a fiddle. Mogwe still drives himself and does not even wear spectacles when behind the wheel. So fit to drive is Mogwe that he often drives to South Africa to buy supplies for his farm. When I first phoned him, I made sure to lock myself in a quiet room because, given his old age, I had anticipated to talk to someone with a withered voice and auditory impairment. To my surprise, Mogwe's voice came out very loud and clear; even clearer than the voice you hear when the Mascom mobile phone company lady says 'Your balance is insufficient to make this call'. He took me by surprise when he returned my call last week Monday and we set the date and time for our meeting at his farm in May 2015.

I had to wait for three hours at his farm because he was not there at the agreed time. His workers, however, offered me great hospitality in his absence. From the herdboy who opened the gate for me to the house keeper who ushered me to the patio, the reception was a real royal. Mogwe finally arrives, looking so full of life. He looks suave with his shirt neatly tucked in Super Sport cardigans. I jump off the chair to greet him. He tells me he is only still alive by the mercy of God and not that he is useful anymore!

Mogwe seems to underplay his importance and usefulness but tell you what; this is a man who has employed several people at his farm and these people in turn take care of their families thus magnifying Mogwe's noblesse oblige. Since I arrived here, I have seen two house keepers who take care of him and his mansion. His house puts a lot of houses in Gaborone suburbs to shame (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Mogwe relaxing at his mansion



It is a huge mansion in the wilderness surrounded by orchards and manicured lawns. I have seen a gardener and several herdsmen all of whom earn salaries from him. In fact, during the interview, his

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farm manager brought one of the boys who wanted to ask for advance salary as he wanted to send some money to his parents. ‘O bata go romela madi ko basading kana ko batsading?’ [‘Do you intend sending money to women or parents?’] Mogwe teases the boy before he gives him his full salary and I must say his farm workers earn decent salaries that are far more than the stipulated minimum wage. The love and respect between Rre Mogwe and his workers is very visible. They call him ‘daddy’ and curtsy when they talk to him. He speaks highly of them and says they are the most loyal and hardworking people he has ever come across.

Archibald Mooketsa Mogwe was born in Kanye but grew up in Goo-Moswaana, which is now called Mmathethe. He was living with his mother and his grandfather who was a priest with the London Missionary Society (LMS). Mogwe schooled in Goo-Moswaana until he had to go for standard 6 at Kanye. ‘*Ke tllhabologetse ko Kanye*’ [‘I became sophisticated at Kanye’], he says and throws himself into fits of laughter. He says his father never really wanted him to get educated and to him, a boy belonged at the cattle post and not in the classroom. Surprisingly though, he says, his father had a soft spot for his elder brother who was given the nod to attend school while Mogwe was made to herd cattle. ‘I was made to trek cattle and goats from Goo-Moswaana to Molepolole on foot’, he says with a sad face.

Mogwe is the second born in a family of 10 siblings. Growing up, he was forced to go to church and used mortar and pestle to prepare mielie-meal for the family. ‘During our times, boys were treated just like dogs while the girls were always given preferential treatment’, Mogwe notes. During his school days in Kanye, Mogwe says he had classmates who were much older than him. In fact, he says some students were even older than the teachers but the student-teacher respect was never compromised as the students were orderly. He would later go to Tigerkloof where he trained as a teacher. ‘That is where I met Gaositwe [Chiepe]’, he says about a later fellow cabinet minister. He speaks highly of Chiepe’s intellect and substance. Mogwe says Tigerkloof was a one-stop learning centre where almost everything was taught. ‘You could go there to learn sewing, leathery, farming, teaching and any other profession you can think of’, he says. From Tigerkloof he went to teach in Kanye. His former teachers at Tigerkloof had noted his high flying performance at school and put pressure on his parents to send him back to school to acquire his senior matric.

When the likes of Chiepe were sponsored by the colonial government to go and further their studies abroad, the same opportunity was never extended to Mogwe as authorities were of the view that his parents could afford to sponsor him. He, nonetheless, told Chiepe, ‘When you come back with your Bachelor of Arts degree, I would have also found a way to acquire it’. And he did. While going through a South African newspaper, Mogwe saw an advert calling for teachers in the Orange Free State province in South Africa. He applied and was accepted. He taught in the Orange Free State for six years and says he earned four times what he earned in Botswana in terms of remuneration.

Mogwe started his career in the civil service as education inspector but his big break came when he was appointed permanent secretary to president by President Sir Seretse Khama after Botswana gained independence. ‘From office of the president I worked somewhere but I can’t immediately remember’, he tells me. He became a specially elected member of parliament (MP) in 1974 and was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in the same year. He speaks fondly of his time as Minister of Foreign Affairs. ‘I was known all over the world. When I entered the room, everyone knew Mogwe was around’, he says with a somewhat naughty smile.

It is at this juncture that I remind him of how his colleagues in cabinet are said to have been jealous of his globetrotting portfolio. In his memoirs *Very Brave or Very Foolish*, former President Sir Ketumile Masire write, ‘I switched Mogwe from foreign affairs to minerals. Mr Mogwe’s colleagues had begun to think he was drifting away from Botswana, and that he was seeing himself more as an international politician. In the 1979 elections, people like Mr Ngwako wanted Mr Mogwe to fight an

election and lose, so he would be brought down to Mother Earth and be dropped from the cabinet'. He sits up straight and says, 'Those people were jealous of me because I was travelling the world and rubbing shoulders with big shots. Actually their wives were the ones who were more jealous because I travelled to places like America with my wife'. I ask if he is still in touch with Masire and he answers in the affirmative and says Masire is his 'Kgosi' from the same ward they come from in Kanye. I ask him if he still remembers the day he prevailed over Masire when he wanted to drop Daniel Kwelagobe from cabinet. He can't seem to recall the incident until I quote to him what Masire wrote in his book. Masire wrote, 'Dan (Kwelagobe) was always a very difficult fellow in cabinet. At one point I was so fed up with him that I was ready to throw him out of cabinet, since older ministers would rather keep quiet than argue with him. However, Mr Mogwe said that 'This is just a youngster; you must expect him to misbehave sometimes'. He laughs and says: 'Quett told you about that'. During his time as foreign affairs minister, Mogwe played a crucial role as a peace broker between ZANU and ZAPU in Zimbabwe. He also played an important role as a facilitator in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue.

After eleven years at foreign affairs, Mogwe was moved to mineral resources where he remained minister until 1994 when he ceased to be a member of parliament. The following year, 1995, he was posted to America as ambassador. It was during his time as Ambassador that President Bill Clinton of the United States visited Botswana and Mogwe had to prepare and facilitate the trip. 'I had to come to Botswana a bit earlier, before Clinton's arrival so I could teach our people here how to behave around the Americans', he says as I fail to contain my laughter over his statement. I enquire if he has ever harboured ambitions to become President and he is quick to say 'Never!' He says he loves his freedom so much he would never have taken a job that involves being followed around by body guards and protocol officers every day.

After having a sumptuous lunch and tea for dessert with Mogwe, I end the interview and implore him to go and rest but he tells me he finds it difficult to just sit idle and do nothing. He would rather help his gardener or take a walk in his farm. He walks me to the car and goes to open the gate for me. We wave at each other as I drive out and I feel blessed to have had the privilege to spend some time with this larger than life icon.

(This piece is a revised version of the one that appeared in *The Monitor*, 04 May 2015).