

IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

Botswana's phenomenal economic growth rates are driven largely by the mineral sector. However, high growth rates have not created sufficient jobs because of the enclave / structural nature of the country's economy. The 2009/10 Botswana Core Welfare Indicators Survey (BCWIS) put the national unemployment rate at 17.8%. However, unemployment in Botswana is more intense amongst the youth who accounts for 41.4% and 34% (of the total unemployed) for age groups 15-19 and 20-24, respectively. These figures suggest that youth unemployment is a major socio-economic problem. Using trends in youth unemployment in Botswana, this paper examines the economic and political implications of the standing problem of youth unemployment in Botswana. It reviews existing youth programmes, in particular the Internship Programme, and draws lessons from other countries in terms of how the programme can be made more effective as a way of easing youth unemployment in the country.

1.0 Introduction

There is consensus in the literature that youth unemployment negatively affects the youth's quality of life. There are different strands of literature and the one that stands out attributes the increase in youth unemployment to rigidities of labour markets (O'Reilly et al. 2015). In view of this, there has been a move to enhance flexibility in the market. As a result, there has been a rise in part-time and temporary contracts for young people vis-à-vis other age groups. Although temporary contracts tend to pay less and offer minimal on-the-job training, they 'ease the entry of first-time job seekers into stable employment where employees use them as screening devices to test skills and productivity' (O'Reilly et al. 2015:4). This observation feeds well into the recent trend in employers' expectations, that the youth should be 'job-ready'. In turn, training institutions are expected to equip young people with 'employability' skills. The trend has led to an expansion in internship programmes that are either unpaid or badly paid. These types of programmes have been exploited by employers who deliberately use them to evade offering young people proper paid probation contracts. The other contributor to youth unemployment is skills mismatch (Ghignoni and Verashchagina 2014). Furthermore, they attribute skills mismatch to youth accepting job offers that require lower educational level than what they possess. To overcome the problem, a country needs to implement new technologies since they encourage demand shifts in support of more educated workers, hence reduce over-education (ibid).

For purposes of this paper, we adopt a definition of unemployment that is used in most countries that basically consider an unemployed person as someone who is able and actively looking for a job, but cannot find one. However, this definition presents some conceptual difficulties and thus misleading as it discounts discouraged workers (those who would like (and able) to work but have given up on looking for a job). A lot of studies have been conducted and they point to high unemployment rates in different regions of the world, suggesting that unemployment is a major developmental challenge that requires concerted efforts to tackle it. For instance, in 2015 unemployment was projected at 12.5% in North Africa, 11% in the Middle East, 7.5% in the developed countries and the European Union, 7.7% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 4.8% in East Asia and 5.9% Worldwide (The Statistics Portal). However, the challenge of unemployment is particularly dire amongst the youth in Africa. For instance, Abinader (2014) reported that youth in Africa made two-fifths of those of working age yet they constituted three-fifths of those unemployed. It was also observed that Africa has a young population, with youths making 60% of the overall population, and 290 million people were in the age range of 10 – 24. Despite constituting a significant proportion of the population, the youth in Africa were largely excluded from participation in the formal economy (Abinader, 2014).

With regard to the southern Africa region, it has been observed that “youth unemployment remains a barrier to the region’s development”, with 51% and 43% young women and men respectively being unemployed (Devlin, 2013). The African Economic Outlook (2015) noted that “young people aged between 15 and 25 represent more than 60 per cent of the continent’s total population and account for 45 per cent of the total labour force. Unlike other developing regions, sub-Saharan Africa’s population is becoming more youthful, with youth as a proportion of the total population projected at over 75 per cent by 2015, due to the high fertility rate underlying the demographic momentum”. It was further stated that “... about 133 million young people (more than 50 per cent of the youth population) in Africa are illiterate. Many young people have little or no skills and are therefore largely excluded from productive economic and social life” (African Economic Outlook, 2015). According to the World Bank (2015), youth unemployment in 2013 for the ages 15-24 for South Africa was projected at 53.5%; Swaziland 42.4%, Mauritius 23.6%, Kenya 17.1%, Nigeria 13.6%, just to cite a few cases.

The unemployment statistics, cited above, are likely to be higher if discouraged workers were to be considered. The statistics suggest that there is pressure to ensure involvement of the youth in the formal sector of the economy in order to mitigate the debilitating effects of high youth unemployment. In his attempt to explain high youth unemployment in Africa, Amare (2014) stated that “although a growing youth population is a challenge, it cannot fully explain the unemployment figures in Africa. The figures instead are largely the result of specific economic and political contexts. Lack of investment in infrastructure and subsidy for sectors with potential for creating jobs for example, have created deep structural issues. In many cases, these issues predate the youth bulge”. Having considered the nature of unemployment generally, we turn to the nature on unemployment in Botswana.

2.0 The Nature of Unemployment in Botswana

Unemployment tends to have a distributional effect on those who are unemployed - i.e. unemployment brings about unequal burden. One of the differences in the burden is observed according to the level of education. Unemployment is expected to be higher, on average, amongst those with lower

education levels than those with higher levels (Siphambe, 2003). Statistics show that as far as education levels are concerned, high youth unemployment rate in Botswana is not in the main a function of low levels of education. For instance, the 2009/10 BCWIS report, suggests that only 21% of those unemployed had no training/low education levels. To the contrary, a large majority (79%) had undergone some (level of) training. A summary of the unemployment rate according to the level of training is summarised in Table 1. If education is not the main driver of unemployment in Botswana as suggested by the statistics in Table 1, what accounts for a high youth unemployment rate in Botswana? The paper offers some plausible explanations. First, one of the documented explanations (Powell and Short, 2013) is attitude towards work (i.e. showing commitment to work such as, coming on time, being focused, going out of one’s way to complete tasks etc.) amongst the Botswana labour force.

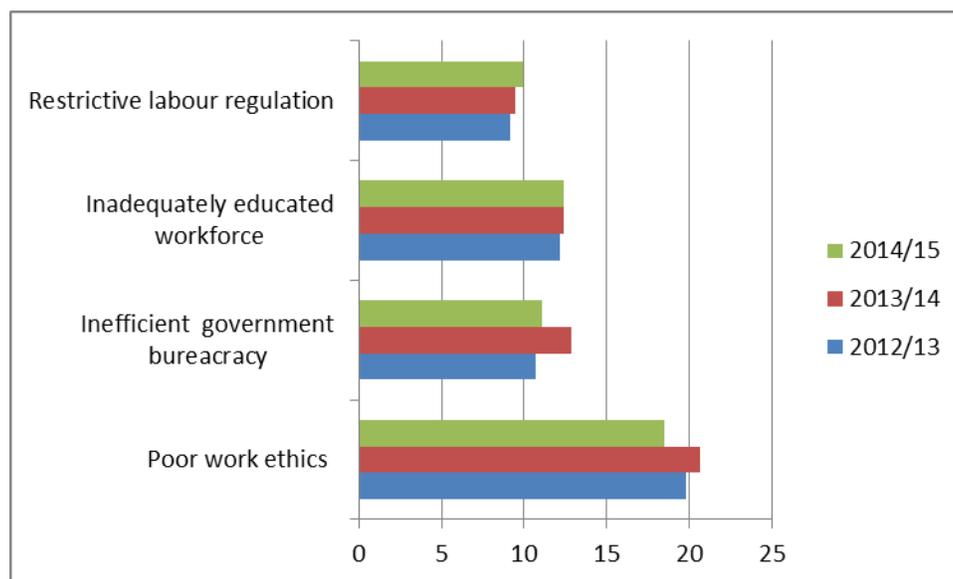
Table 1: Unemployment rate by level of training 2009/10

Training	Male	Female	Total
No Training	17.1	25.0	21.0
Apprentice Cert	12.8	19.0	14.8
Brigade Cert	17.2	18.2	17.5
Vocational Cert	10.6	15.3	12.9
Educ. College Cert.	10.6	9.3	9.9
University Cert.	0.0	15.0	9.5
Other Certificate	5.9	11.2	8.2
Vocational Diploma	6.1	6.1	6.1
Educ. College Diploma	2.1	4.7	3.7
University Diploma	3.3	14.8	7.8
IHS Diploma	6.7	1.6	2.8
Other Diploma	6.9	4.4	5.8
University Degree	4.5	4.9	4.7
Other Degree	5.1	12.4	7.7
Not Stated	12.7	16.8	14.7
Total	14.6	21.4	17.9

Source: Statistics Botswana (August 2013). BCWIS 2009/10 Report.

In fact, according to the World Economic Forum ‘s Global Competitive Report (as shown in Figure 1) ‘poor work ethics in national labour force’ consistently recorded the highest rate of all the most challenging factors for doing business for the period 2012/13-2014/15. The variable of an ‘inadequately educated work force’ is the second largest challenge for the economy. It is possible that the high unemployment rate may be attributed to at least one of these issues; the former being more likely than the latter.

Figure 1: Some of the most challenging issues for doing business in Botswana



The other possible explanation for high unemployment in Botswana may be due to youth training that is not targeted at those sectors with the highest potential to generate employment. Table 2 below summarises the different employment elasticities. Powell and Short (2013) and Siphambe, Thaga and Setlhare (2013) argue that educational institutions do not provide skills that are required by potential employers. This outcome tends to lead to low productivity and poor work ethics as the youth may accept work that they are not adequately trained for or even like. The internship programme is one such initiative that has the potential to bridge the gap between the skills supplied and those demanded.

Table 1: Employment Elasticities by Sector: 1991-2005 & 2006-2010

Sector/Economic Activity	1991-2005			2006-2010		
	Annual Output Growth (%)	Annual Employment Growth (%)	Employment Elasticity	Annual Output Growth (%)	Annual Employment Growth (%)	Employment Elasticity
Agriculture	-1.3	1.0	-0.78	5.0	2.6	0.38
Mining & Quarrying	7.8	0.1	0.01	-1.7	2.7	-1.12
Manufacturing	3.4	3.0	0.87	5.1	2.0	0.40
Electricity & Water	7.3	0.7	0.10	3.8	8.9	2.00
Construction	3.2	-0.2	-0.07	5.3	-1.3	-0.17

Trade, hotels & Restaurants	9.5	2.2	0.23	5.7	5.3	0.68
Transport & Communication	4.5	1.9	0.41	10.8	0.7	0.07
Finance & Business Services	5.9	1.2	0.20	8.0	10.7	1.36
Total Economy	6.3	2.2	0.34	2.8		

Source: Kanyenze (2012)

With regard to training, it is suggested that priority should be accorded to a sector’s elasticity. In terms of carrying out placements of interns, priority should be given according to a sector’s elasticity. For the period between 2006 and 2010 the first three to be given priority were: Electricity and Water; Finance and Business Services and Trade, Hotels and Restaurants.

3.0 Economic and Political Implications of Youth Unemployment in Botswana

Botswana has earned the status of a middle income country, in terms of the World Bank classification. Like most countries, Botswana is not immune to the challenge of unemployment, despite its middle income status, and having a small population that was projected at around 2 million according to the 2011 Population Census. In fact, generating gainful jobs has been a major policy imperative as the country’s high growth rates has not created sufficient jobs because of the enclave nature of the country’s economy, which is mainly driven by the mineral sector. In particular, the problem of unemployment in Botswana is high amongst the youth. For instance, the 2009/2010 Botswana Core Welfare Indicators (BCWIS) projected youth unemployment for age groups 15-19 and 20-24 at 41.4% and 34% respectively. This is higher than the national unemployment rate that was put at 17.8%, according to the 2009/2010 BCWIS. It is in this context that the World Bank noted that “Unemployment has remained persistent at nearly 20%, and as a consequence, income inequality in Botswana is among one of the highest in the world” (The World Bank, 2014). Unemployment is real and a major political issue in Botswana. For instance, it was a major campaign issue in the run-up to the October 2014 elections. Undoubtedly, high youth unemployment has negative ramifications for any country. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2012:19) is authoritative on this, noting that “youth unemployment has a profound impact on young people’s lives, and has implications for long-term vulnerability brought about by marginalization and exclusion”. This is supported by Devlin (2013), who noted that a “large unemployed population indicates lost potential since communities and nations fail to benefit from what the young people could theoretically contribute. Also, difficulties finding and sustaining employment detract from a young person’s lifetime productivity and earnings, making it more challenging to escape poverty” (Devlin, 2013).

Equally, the Government of Botswana has acknowledged the challenge presented by high youth unemployment. A former Minister of Youth, Sport and Culture in Botswana, Kgathi affirmed that “youth unemployment has become a threat to the social, economic and political stability of nations. The situation of youth unemployment thus deserves urgent attention as it threatens to violate the principles of equality

and solidarity between generations, which is an important aspect of social justice. In addition, while unemployment destroys the economic and personal welfare of all those affected by it regardless of age, the destruction is most pronounced when it occurs at the fragile start of one's working life" (Kgathi, 2012). It is in this context that UNICEF (2012:19) noted that "A number of countries in Africa have identified youth unemployment as a matter of national security and job creation is being encouraged in order to provide youth with an alternative to a life of crime and war". This is underscored by Adesina (2013) in relation to Nigeria. Adesina (2013:146) remarked that "high unemployment situations lead to serious security problems for the respective nations. Hence, one of the factors adduced for the increasing security challenges in Nigeria is unemployment".

The Government of Botswana has responded to this problem by introducing a number of policy measures / programmes geared towards benefiting the youth. These include the National Internship Programme, Youth Empowerment Scheme, etc. However, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2012:19) cautioned that "many of these interventions are however not evidence-based and largely fail to address the age and gender specific needs of adolescents". This may in part explain why these measures are not succeeding in producing the desired results. Accordingly, this paper offers a brief review of the various policy measures introduced by the government of Botswana, focusing on a case study of the internship programme as a possible way of easing out the problem of youth unemployment in the country – drawing lessons from some European countries.

4.0 Youth Unemployment Programmes/Interventions

In order to address the persisting youth unemployment issue, the government has since 2006 introduced initiatives that were intended to ease the situation. The initiatives include the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), 'Back-to-school' initiative, Youth Development Fund (YDF), Young Farmers Fund (YFF) and the National Internship Programme (NIP). Each of these is briefly outlined below:

YES is an initiative introduced in order to assist unemployed youth to gain skills and with the hope that the mentorship and skills gained in the programme will help youth succeed in entrepreneurship. With effect from the 1st April 2014, the programme was modified to bring in a new component—Botswana National Service Programme (Tirelo Sechaba). According to the latest figures, as at November 2014, the programme had 11,200 youth enrolled (State of the Nation Address, 2014). The programme is intended to expose youth to the work environment through community development.

'Back to school' initiative is a programme targeted at approximately 50,000 out of school and unemployed young people. As of November 2012, 1,320 of the target group went back to school. An additional 9,118 students were registered in tertiary institutions to advance their credentials. The 2012 State of Nation Address anticipated that an average of 20,000 participants will benefit from the programme between 2013 and 2014.

YDF is intended to stimulate youth participation in the socio-economic advancement of the country. It targets unemployed, rural and out of school youth, who would otherwise have to migrate to urban areas for opportunities. As of 2009 the programme has financed 2,276 (up until end of 2012) projects, creating 3,604 jobs and business skills training to 807 beneficiaries (State of the Nation Address, 2012).

YFF is a scheme offered through the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) since 2006 with the intention of providing loans at subsidised interest rates and a longer repayment than loans typically offered by CEDA. In March 2015, a proposal was made to transform and broaden the YFF to include a wider range of sectors into what will be known as a Youth Entrepreneurship Fund (YEF).

NIP falls under the Department of National Internship Programme (DNIP) which was formed in August 2008 through a presidential directive CAB 28(A)/2008 CAB MEMO 154 to act as an enabler for graduates to network with organisations in order to acquire skills needed in the work place. The programme is expected to tackle youth unemployment by enhancing the targeted group’s employability. The scheme is not the first of its kind. As shown in Table 3 below, there were others that preceded NIP. The programme was initially under the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs (MLHA) but has since 1st April 2014 moved to the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture (MYSC).

Table 3: A summary of internship/work experience programmes in Botswana

Programme	Target group	Duration	Management & Financing	Associated Problems
National Internship Programme	Graduates with degree & scarce skills diploma	24 months	Department of National Internship Programme: under the Ministry of Youth Sports & Culture.	Lack of staffing, limited placement, duplications of functions of different divisions.
Apprenticeship Programme	Junior Certificate level entry	Four-year programme; 9 months per year & 3years in college	Responsibility of BOTA, but managed by MTTC.	Limited industry places
University attachments	Undergraduates in practical subjects	6-12 weeks	An internship unit exists at UB, managed by departments.	Competition from the government’s internship program and finding places. Problems of monitoring students
Brigades	O’level completers	Normally up to 4 years	Managed by DVET.	No life skills focus. Reduction of practical skills.

Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP)	Final 3 years of Technical College training	4-year programme based in 6 regional Technical Colleges	EU funds used to develop the program. Now managed and funded through DVET	Need for more flexibility to meet industry demands. Some employers want more practical skills.
Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)	18-35 year olds (little qualification /skills)	6 week 'boot camp' & one year work placement in open employment	Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture	No evaluation as yet.

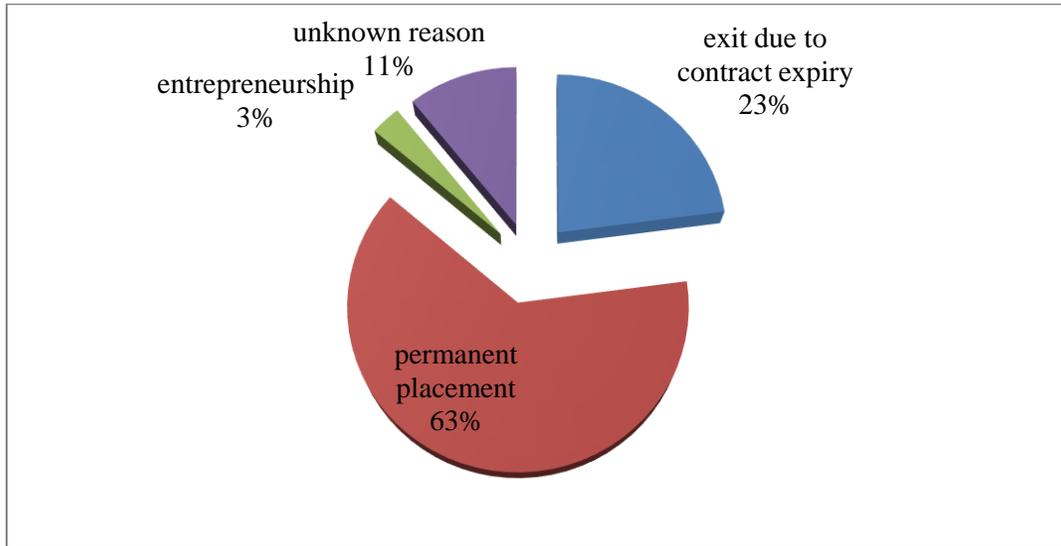
Source: Powell & Short (2013)

Amongst the several programmes that the government has put in place to tackle youth unemployment, the internship programme is the one that has the most potential of offering practical skills to unemployed graduates and as such address poor work ethics. The use of the internship is not unique to Botswana because it is used as a way of curbing unemployment in other countries. Internship programmes have gained popularity in recent years even in developed countries that are also faced with increasing incidents of youth unemployment. For instance, in Australia, the internship programme adopts numerous forms in order to tackle the problem of unemployment. In fact, they use numerous and integrated approaches in order to appreciate the fact that unemployment is caused by several factors (Siphambe et al. 2013). As far as internship in developing countries is concerned, Pakistan is one of the countries that provide an internship programme similar to the one offered in Botswana (Siphambe et al. 2013) although the duration in Pakistan is shorter (12 months rather than the 24 months in Botswana).

5.0 Performance of the NIP

It is difficult to measure the effect of NIP in tackling youth unemployment given that the Government of Botswana has not set a target as to how many participants should benefit from the programme during a specified period. Furthermore, the programme is still in its infancy as it was only introduced in 2008. On face value, the internship programme has provided positive outcomes in terms of job progression. The Minister of MLHA Edwin Batshu reported that between 2008 and 2014, 8,758 graduates were offered an internship and 6,358 (73%) of these were offered permanent positions. Most of the potential interns (in the waiting list) are fresh graduates, which imply that the program is achieving its intended objective of absorbing the unemployed youth. However, as shown in Figure 2, a study conducted by Siphambe et al. (2013) revealed that 63% of interns managed to secure permanent jobs within the 24 months duration of the programme.

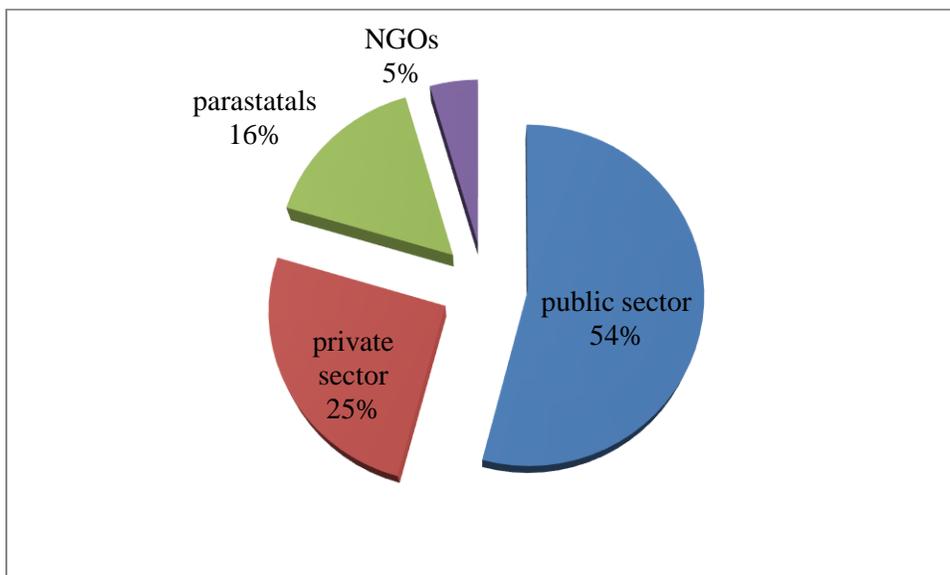
Figure 2: Reasons for exiting the programme: 2013/14 Financial Year



Source: Siphambe, Thaga and Setlhare (2013)

As depicted in Figure 3, the majority of the interns secure their jobs in the public sector (54%) followed by the private sector (25%), parastatals (16%) and NGOs (5%). The fact that the public sector is the highest contributor to the job market absorption is not encouraging because, as things stand, government spending as a percentage of GDP is very high. This implies that the government should reduce its participation in the labour market or the private sector should be encouraged to increase its participation in the labour market. In this way, the scheme can be improved by reducing heavy reliance on the government for employment.

Figure 3: Job market absorption of NIP: By sector



Source: Siphambe, Thaga and Setlhare (2013)

6.0 Limitations Associated with the Programme

In order to instil the value of actual work and reinforce a framework for working, interns must be paid. Indeed, in Botswana, the interns are paid a monthly allowance by the government. Initially (when the programme was first introduced) the allowance was a total of P2, 000 per month (an intern getting P1, 800 and the other P200 saved for them). The allowance was then pegged to tertiary student allowances with effect from the 1st April 2013; the new allowance is now a total of P1, 420 per month (intern takes home P1, 320 and P100 is saved). The internship programme in Botswana may not be sustainable in the long run because the government bears all the costs of hosting an intern. To improve on sustainability, the country should adopt a system similar to most countries in the European Union (EU) where funding is from different sources such as university grants, personal financing and provision of funding by host companies. Evidence from Botswana suggests that the majority of organisations are willing to share the cost of hosting the programme. A study conducted by, Siphambe et al. (2013) suggested that 69% of host companies agreed to the possibility of a co-hosted programme). Furthermore, the period associated with the programme could be reduced from 24 months to about 6-9 months as is the case in countries like Ireland, so that the programme caters for the ever increasing unemployment amongst graduates. The other limitation associated with the programme is the weak link between the Directorate of Public Service Management (DPSM) - the human resource body of government and DNIP. For instance, it has been documented (e.g. Siphambe et al. 2013) that in some cases an intern working for a certain division may be overlooked for a position in favour of another intern from a different division or someone not in the internship programme when filling a vacancy. To overcome this coordination lapse, the DNIP should develop a database of those who are involved in the programme (and the divisions they are attached to) and update it on a regular basis and be made available to the DPSM.

7.0 Conclusion

The paper examined the economic and political repercussions of the persistent problem of youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is undesirable in the sense that it poses as a threat to social security, political and economic stability, leads to income and productivity losses. To overcome the problem of youth unemployment, the Government of Botswana has introduced several programmes, including the internship programme. Although the programme has some limitations, it has provided some positive results in absorbing interns in the work place, albeit concentrated in the public sector (a sector that needs to be downsized if economic diversification is to become a reality).

Evidence from other countries (e.g. United Kingdom, Ireland) suggests that internship is not a bad idea and is generally used to facilitate a smooth transition from school to work. Therefore, the Government of Botswana could improve on the NIP programme by (a) setting targets on how many participants should be permanently absorbed; (b) introducing cost sharing to address the issue of sustainability. The private sector should play a more pivotal role in terms of cost sharing, absorption of participants and administration of the programme; (c) reconsidering the period of the programme, specifically, reducing the length from the current 24 months and (d) insisting on the infusion of internship into academic curricula by exposing students to current work practices.

As noted above, NIPs are used around the world as a means of facilitating a smooth school-to-work transition. The programme (or any other of a similar nature, such as career-related volunteering and

community service) ensures that youth are able to gain training on skills that are needed in the job market and through such programmes, youth are prepared in terms of acquiring the market's work ethics (such as being sensitized to issues of punctuality, etc.). The 'employability' skills that programmes such as the NIP (and temporary contracts, in general) are trying to instil are mainly guided by employers who expect 'job-ready' graduates. It is therefore important for training institutions (especially at the tertiary level) to develop curricula in line with the labour demands in order to overcome skills mismatch. To enforce such curricula, the government could insist that public institutions infuse internship (or any practical based training) in its curricula. In addition, tracer studies by training institutions or the NIP office can go a long way in closing the skills mismatch gap. In fact, a 2010 Botswana Training Authority (BOTA) report indicated that few institutions in Botswana carry out such studies. Even then, those that have been carried out are outdated.

For future research, there is a need to determine the extent of the skills mismatch so that interventions could be targeted to the source of the problem. Such research will shed light on whether high unemployment rates are due to the way the education system is set up. For instance, it will provide answers as to whether there is a right balance between general education vs. practical training. Furthermore, the research would highlight lessons that can be learnt from countries such as Germany that have youth unemployment under control, owing to a dual training system. This will ensure that programmes like the NIP are evidence-based. Moreover, for those who secured job offers while undertaking their internship, it is important to establish whether those were suitable jobs they qualified for. The literature (e.g. O'Reilly et al. 2015) suggests that in some instances, youth accept job offers that require educational qualification lower than what they possess. Therefore, if this issue is not taken into account, it is possible that those who get jobs may not be gainfully employed.

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