

IMPROVING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN BOTSWANA: THE NEED FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Policy and programmes in response to youth unemployment in Botswana have hitherto not produced the desired results despite sustained political support reflected by massive government spending on youth development programmes, number of programmes initiated and youth enrolled. However, government has often been criticized for spending funds on short term under-employment and indecent jobs, quick fixes and unsustainable programmes with little impact on job creation. The objective of this paper is to examine the strengths and challenges of programmes meant to address youth unemployment and suggest innovative long lasting solutions to improve prospects of youth employment in Botswana. It will highlight the need to reflect on the appropriateness of past and current policy decisions taken to address youth unemployment. This paper argues that in order to address the prevailing challenges, greater emphasis should be put on research to generate reliable empirical data on the pervasive problem of youth unemployment in Botswana.

1.0 Introduction and Background

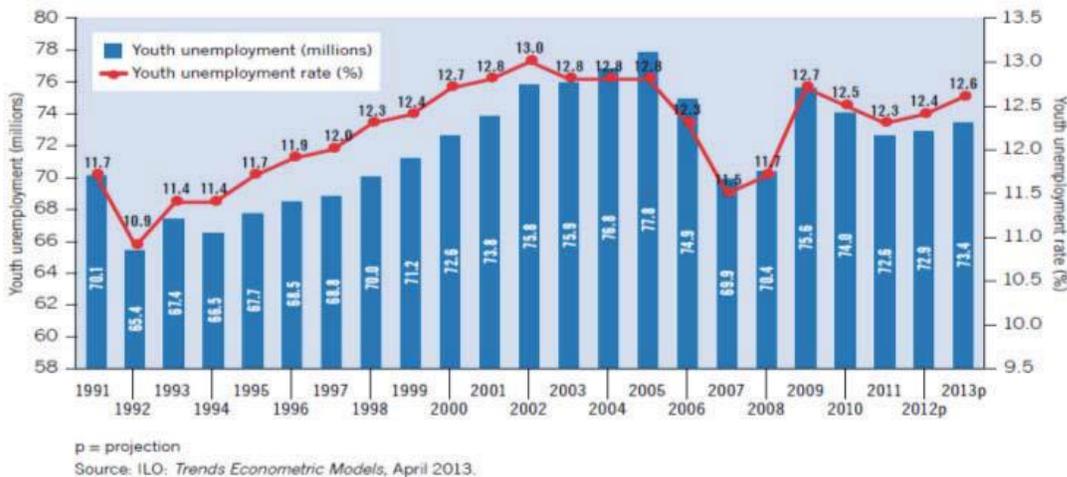
In recent times, the world has witnessed an unprecedented problem of youth unemployment. Consequently, a compendium of studies has been conducted in both the northern and southern contexts on a wide array of social policy issues and resultant programme responses to address the problem (see for example, Gonzo and Plattner, 2003; Goerge, 2000; World Bank, 2007; Rankopo et. al. 2007; Martin, 2012; Amare, 2014). This notwithstanding, youth unemployment rates continue to rise despite concerted efforts to reverse the trend (ILO, 2013). In Botswana, available data from various sources exists about the magnitude of the problem (see Botswana Labour Force Survey, 2006; BAIS IV, 2013; Botswana Core Welfare Indicator Survey (2009/10); Statistics Botswana, 2013; Kenewendo, 2012). From these studies/surveys, it can be said that relative to adults, the majority of young people remain unemployed. It was, perhaps, in response to the above concerns that the Botswana government has initiated and established numerous programmes to deal with the plight of the youth. Throughout succeeding national development plans, and related national strategic documents, the Botswana government has sought to address and improve prospects of youth employment. In 1996, the Government formally adopted the first National Policy on Youth (Youth Policy, 1996) as its chief strategy for youth development. By doing so, if mainly for pragmatic rather than political reasons, the government recognized that the youth are disadvantaged and need urgent attention. However, this recognition did not translate into creating sustainable employment opportunities and improving quality of life for the youth in a meaningful way. Instead, there have been increasing concerns that the Youth Policy has not fully achieved its objectives (Youth Policy, 2010; Morima, 2012). Against this background, the paper identifies the root causes, effects and the challenges of youth unemployment in Botswana. It examines policy and programme responses meant to tackle youth

unemployment and identify those that aggravate the problem. It seeks to determine why current youth interventions are unable to effectively deliver on set objectives and proposes reasoned solutions. The paper is structured as follows. Following an introduction, the paper presents section two, which is an overview of and theories on youth unemployment. This is followed by section three which discusses the causes, effects and responses to the problem of youth unemployment in Botswana. Next, is section four which examines the strengths and challenges of policies and programmes responses. This is followed by section five which is the discussion. Finally, section six draws a conclusion and way forward.

2.0 Youth Unemployment: An overview

The International Conference of Labour Statisticians defines a person as unemployed if she/he meets all the following three conditions: (a) is without work (b) is available for work (c) seeking for work. The definition is time bound and refers to the reference period of time. Guided by this broad definition, the International Labour Organization found that there were approximately 75.1 million young people struggling to find work around the world at the end of 2010 (ILO, Report, 2012). In the United Kingdom, youth unemployment fluctuated moderately within the range of 12% of the labour force throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Youth unemployment rose from 3% in the 1970s to 6% by 1976 and doubled to 12% in 1982 (Minford, Davies & Eel, 1985). Likewise, in other European countries, youth unemployment also increased dramatically from just fewer than 4% in West Germany in 1979 to over 13% at the end of 1984. A noticeable increase was also recorded in

Global youth unemployment rates, 1991 - 2013



Source ILO, (2013:8)

Figure 1 above shows that global unemployment rate averages 12% which translates into 75 million unemployed youth (ILO, 2013). In France and Great Britain approximately 25% of all young people in the job market were unemployed (Pierre, 1985). More recent data indicates that youth unemployment remain somewhat higher relative to the adult population across Europe (OECD, 2014).

In response to the ever rising problem of youth unemployment in the Western countries, some policies and programmes have been implemented to tackle the problem. For example, in Canada Youth

Unemployment Insurance was introduced in 1971 (Khan, 2010). The programme allows employers to keep labour force attached during a temporary downturn and thereby forgo the costs of recruiting and training workers once production returns to its normal level. In the far east (Asia), in particular, Hong Kong, policies to tackle youth unemployment, includes provision of allowances to organizations that employ youth with no previous work experience and thus creates employment opportunities for fresh graduates (Kerr, 2000). In Africa, youth unemployment is also a major problem (Simiyu and Sambu, 2012). Table 1 below summarize youth unemployment rates in selected African countries.

Table 1: Rates of Youth Unemployment in selected Africa countries

Country	Youth unemployment rate (%)	Unemployment rate (%)
Nigeria	37.7	23.9
South Africa	48	23.9
Egypt		11.8
Algeria	21.5	10
Botswana	-	17.6
Comoros	44.5	14.3
Congo democratic republic	70	-
Congo republic	42	16
Djibouti	-	50
Gabon	30	16
Ghana	25	
Gambia	40	-
Guinea Bestu	30	-
Mali	15.4	
Mauritania	59.9	-
Mauritius	21.9	7.9
Mozambique	-	27
Namibia	-	51.2
Sierra Leone	60	-
Rwanda	42	-
Sudan	22	11
Swaziland	50	-

Source: Araya Mesele (2012:3)

Data reported in Table 1 above reveal that most African countries have very high rates of youth unemployment. Almost all the countries recorded unemployment rates above the global average rate of 12%. On the extreme is Sierra Leone which recorded the highest youth unemployment rate of 60%. Although Botswana is counted among the countries with lower rates of youth unemployment in Africa, the rates are still considered high for an upper middle income country. Particularly when compared to countries of similar middle income status like Mauritius (African Development Bank, 2012). The causes of youth unemployment in Africa are many and varied. The causes include; mis-education, slow economic growth (leading to low job creation), urban expansion and overpopulation (due to rural urban migration), disastrous government economic and social policies and lack of work experience (See Mago, 2014; Leonor 2007; Benya 2007; Roopanarine 2014; Martin, 2012). Further, Benya (2009) pointed out that universities fail to equip school leavers with employability skills for which there are a foreseeable demand, the effect of which is a mismatch between university education and the labour market requirements.

3.0 Theoretical framework: Contemporary theories on Youth Unemployment

A number of theories provide reasonable explanations of youth unemployment. For the purpose of this paper three theories will be used to inform and guide arguments advanced, namely; the Neo-Classical, structural and mismatch theories. The neo-classical theories were popularized by labour economists (Jubenkanda, 2003; Sembonja, 2007; ILO, 2010; Kahraman, 2011). Neo-Classical theories of employment

are favoured by most economists to explain employment and unemployment conditions in most countries. From the perspective of neo-classical labour economists, unemployment is categorized into among others; voluntary, involuntary and structural (Sembonja, 2007; ILO, 2010) and seasonal (ILO, 2010).

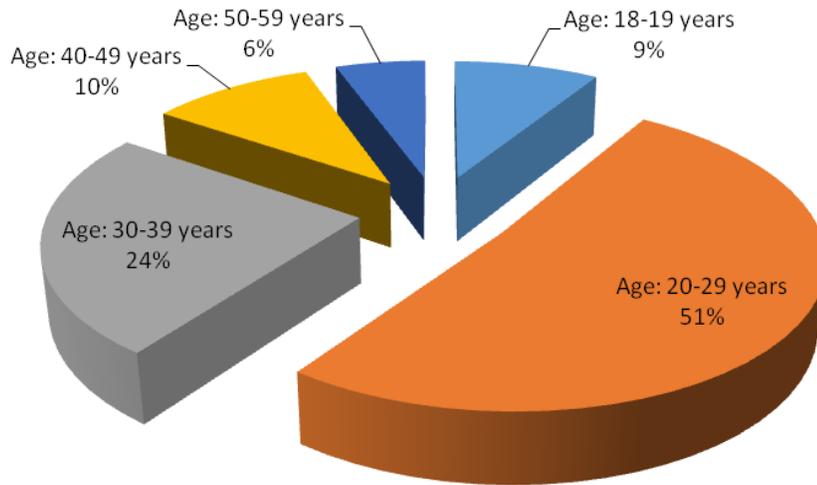
Voluntary unemployment is when people choose not to work at the prevailing market wage rate. Instead choose to stay unemployed because remuneration for work available is far below their wage expectations. Instead of taking available low paying and often indecent jobs they opt for leisure or other activities. In Botswana, the social welfare system (including traditional welfare structure where one is taken care of by the family until old age) has been blamed for encouraging voluntary unemployment among young people. Involuntary unemployment on the other hand, arises when qualified and able bodied people fail to get jobs at the prevailing wage rates. Jubenkanda (2003) posits that involuntary unemployment is a product of coordination failures that result from the disconnection that exists between universities and industry. As a way of trying to address the problem, some universities have introduced internship programs. In Botswana, some of the programs are driven by the government. The programs involve university students getting attached to an organization for a specified period so as to gain practical work skills.

Unemployment is also seen as a structural problem. Sembonja, (2007) observed that excess supply of labour is a major cause of youth unemployment. Under this category the causes of unemployment could be determined as lack of employability among the youth, inadequate job creation and lack of youth entrepreneurs. Structural unemployment can be explained by the mismatch theory. The theory argues that failure of coordination between the educational institutions and industry creates a permanent skills gap that makes school leavers unemployable. Lack of employability means that the school-leavers do not have skills required by the labour market. In Botswana, for example, the education system does not adequately prepare school-leavers for the job market. Thus, school leavers lack relevant education and training that allow them to fit into the labour market. Structural constraints are also faced by first-time job seekers since employers opt for the experienced employees. ILO (2010 and 2013) observed that young employees are the ‘last in’ as employers prefer the experienced, and they are the ‘first out’ as employers prefer to keep adult employees.

4.0 Youth Unemployment in Botswana: How Big Is the Problem?

Like other African countries, Botswana has not been spared the problem of youth unemployment. In 2011, out of about 2,024,904 people living in Botswana, about 941 371 or 46.5% were youth at the time of enumeration (Statistics Botswana, 2011). Nationally, data gleaned from the various sources show that Botswana’s official unemployment rate is high, ranging between 20% and 30% indicating that the majority of youth are unemployed (BCWIS, 2009). The government of Botswana has been struggling to find different ways to increase employment opportunities for the youth but with little success (SONA, 2015; NDP 10 – 2009-2016). Youth unemployment is depicted in Figure 2 below.

Youth Unemployment in Botswana



Source: Statistics Botswana 2010

Figure 2 above shows that unemployment is high among the youth aged 20-29 at 51%, followed by ages 30-39 at 24%. The unemployment situation continues to deteriorate as shown by the latest figures from the Botswana Core Welfare Indicator Survey (Statistics Botswana, 2013). The survey revealed that unemployment rates has remained stubbornly high and are on the increase. According to the survey, unemployment has increased from 17.6% in 2005/06 to 17.8% in 2009/10. In terms of sex and age, female unemployment rate of 41.4% among the 15-19 years old followed by the 20-24-year age group at 34.0% were recorded.

5.0 Causes and Effects of Youth Unemployment in Botswana

International, regional and local literature on youth unemployment has over the years identified and discussed causes and effects of youth unemployment. Many of the root causes and effects are universal (Ajaegbu, 2012; ILO, 2013). Some of the causes that are relevant to the Botswana situation are briefly discussed below.

6.0 Unskilled labour

In Botswana, youth unemployment has been attributed to lack of skills, low levels of education and skills mismatch i.e. the mismatch between labour supply and demand. A combination of these negative factors reduce participation of the youth in the labour market. Keatile (2012) observed that despite concerted efforts by the government of Botswana to create jobs, Botswana is faced with a daunting challenge of limited skilled workers. At present Botswana depends on migrant workers to fill the skills gaps in many professions (CSO, 2011).

7.0 Lack of work experience

Related to the above, ILO (2013) observed that employers prefer to hire youth with work experience, who will not require any training that will cost them financially over those with little or no work experience. ILO observations found credence in the Grand Thornton International Business Report of 2015 which found that the greatest challenges that Botswana faces concerning youth unemployment is shortage of specific or technical skills (79%), lack of work experience (77%) and lack of required qualifications (71%). These statistics shows that shortage of skills to match the requirements of the labour market as major causes of youth unemployment in Botswana.

8.0 Jobless Growth

Botswana continues to post high GDP figures (economic growth) that do not translate into adequate jobs for a small population (approximately 2.2 million people). Government has over the years failed to diversify the economy to non-mining sectors which are known to be labour intensive such as agriculture and manufacturing which can absorb many young people into employment (Mannathoko, 2014).

9.0 Effects of youth unemployment

Youth unemployment leads to increased incidence of poverty, depression, and stress, is linked to lower life expectancy and poor health. There is evidence to suggest that unemployment early in life can significantly reduce an individual's future economic opportunities (see for example, ILO, 2012; Siphambe, 2003; Roopnarine, 2014). Further, these studies have consistently observed that a prolonged spell of unemployment early in a young person's working life can have long term devastating effects on lifetime prospects, potential lower earnings through life, reduced health status and threat of social exclusion. In Botswana, high rates of youth unemployment mean that a large number of the youth are jobless and as such economically inactive. The effect of this is not only on reduced productivity and a decline in gross domestic product (GDP) but also increased economic costs to the state due to increased social welfare costs (Siphambe, 2003; World Bank and BIDPA, 2013).

Linking the discussion on the causes and effects of youth unemployment in Botswana to the theoretical framework on which this paper is anchored, it is discernible that one of the main reasons for high youth unemployment is a growing mismatch between the supply and demand of skills. Youth unemployment is essentially a structural problem. On the supply side of labour, training institutions produce students who lack basic skills to meet the requirements of the job market. In Botswana, for example, there is an over-supply of training for white collar jobs, at the expense of vocational skills such as in agriculture and engineering. (HRDC, 2015). Thus, many graduates have no jobs and are on the street because they lack work experience, practical skills and information about the labour market on which to base their career choices. On the demand side, slow economic growth has meant that the economy cannot generate adequate jobs for its young people. Self-employment is also a challenge because youth lack entrepreneurial skills to create their own jobs (Kenewendo, 2012). Given lack of experience and skills mismatch between supply and demand of labour, graduates who often lack work experience find themselves being trapped in a vicious cycle of youth unemployment. They usually have to go through a frustrating job search period which leads to gaps in employment history, loss of skills and productivity. Young people struggling to find permanent jobs in Botswana accept temporary and intern positions. These are not considered "real or decent jobs", are

less protected, often pay less, and do not offer job related training and social benefits. As a result, unemployed young people are prone to poverty, risk lower wages and future career opportunities.

10.0 Policy and programme response to youth unemployment

In the light of the causes and effects of youth unemployment discussed above, the critical question is: What action should be taken to address youth unemployment in Botswana? The government of Botswana has over the years made concerted efforts to respond to the challenges of youth unemployment. For the purpose of this paper, only three (3) responses are briefly discussed.

11.0 Youth Policy 1996 (Revised 2010)

The Youth Policy of 1996 was the first policy initiative of the 1990s which sought to develop and strengthen a network of institutions for youth development in Botswana. It offered an overarching framework for stakeholders to start thinking more critically about how to tackle youth unemployment. The initiative was crucial because it recognized the “special needs” of the unemployed youth and sought to address them by introducing and implementing different youth programmes. The Revised National Youth Policy (2010) is currently being implemented. The policy has a clear Plan of Action that delineates all the necessary activities needed to operationalize the Plan and achieve the objectives of the policy. Almost all the activities in the Plan focus on development of interventions geared towards tackling youth unemployment. The policy has largely been successful in provision of funding for newly introduced youth economic empowerment programmes. However, the results from such programmes, are yet to be fully realized (MYSC, 2015).

12.0 Youth Development Fund (2009)

Youth Development Fund (YDF) is an empowerment programme aimed at promoting active participation of youth in the socio-economic development of the country. It seeks to promote competitive, sustainable and growth oriented citizen owned youth enterprises and create sustainable employment opportunities (Youth Policy, 2010). The YDF targets individual youth aged 18-35 years irrespective of their socio-economic status, location, ethnicity and gender. The fund disburses amounts ranging from the minimum of P50 000 to a maximum of P100 000 per project. This was meant to be a revolving fund i.e. young people who are funded are expected to pay back after a set period of time with a view to allow other to borrow and the cycle is repeated. In terms of implementation, the only data available is on the number of projects funded, total amount disbursed and the number of youth enrolled. For example, a total of 7,304 projects have received funding amounting to P369, 916,683.72 since the programme inception in 2009 (MYSC, 2015). However, given lack of monitoring and evaluation, the impact of youth projects funded under the Youth Development Fund is yet to be determined. Data on the number of jobs created is scanty and not readily available; therefore, it is difficult to know its success and failure as well as sustainability because the fund has not been evaluated.

13.0 Youth Empowerment Scheme (2012)

Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) was introduced in 2012, overall, the scheme was designed to promote behaviour change, youth empowerment, poverty eradication and skills development. Further and

in demonstration of the above objectives, the scheme was also used to reinforce positive social values such as *botho* (etiquette) and *boitshoko* (perseverance). In terms of application, the scheme places youth volunteers aged between 18 - 35 years in different government departments, NGOs, parastatal and private sector institutions for a fixed period of time. Recruits have to undergo boot camp training before enrolment in the programme. The boot camp training is intended for character building, to inculcate the spirit of patriotism, *botho*, resilience and work ethic. Through this process, the scheme sought to empower the youth through learning and following one's passion. According to MYSC (2015), the scheme has since its inception attracted a sizeable number of youth. Figures released in 2015 revealed that since its inception, 3299 participants have attended YES Boot Camp, with 1893 graduates attached to various Government departments and private entities. However, just like the YDF, it is difficult to determine its success or failure because the scheme has never been evaluated (Vision, 2016 and the MDGs Status Reports 2010 and 2015). These documents identify a number of gaps that need immediate attention by all the stakeholders. Major gaps identified are stated and briefly discussed below:

14.0 Lack of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation

Youth policies and programmes meant to tackle unemployment suffer from the absence of an in-built monitoring and evaluation (M & E) framework. This means that, programme implementers are not able to track progress against set objectives, indicators and targets. Thus it is difficult to determine the extent to which these programmes have delivered or failed to deliver on set objectives. The tendency of government officials has been to focus on the number of projects funded, amount disbursed and the number of young people that have been assisted and not on whether such interventions have made any positive impact and improved quality of life of the youth, in particular, sustainable employment creation (Morima, 2012).

15.0 Lack of Sustainability

One of the major challenges facing programmes meant to tackle youth unemployment is lack of sustainability. Concerns have been raised by the government, programme implementers, programme beneficiaries and the nation at large about the unsustainable nature of the projects because of high expenditure and little or no return on investment (Budget Speech, 2014). Available programme data reveal that only a few of those who graduated from these programmes have succeeded in establishing their own businesses due to lack of entrepreneurial skills. (Statistics Botswana, 2013).

16.0 Absence of Research

A glaring gap exists between research and programme activities in Botswana. Evidence abounds to suggest that policies and programmes decisions meant to tackle youth unemployment are not based on research or empirical evidence (Nthomang and Botlhale 2014). It is imperative that policies and programmes decisions be informed and guided by research. At a practical level, the programme should have an in-built monitoring and evaluation framework to determine the extent to which the programme is able to deliver on its mandate. At present, there is lack of empirical understanding and feedback mechanisms of how youth development programmes are conceived, designed and implemented (Kenewendo, 2012). It is only through the use of scientific data generated through empirical research that the government can design well-informed policies and programmes to effectively meet the needs and aspirations of the unemployed

youth and thus reduce youth unemployment. Lack of systematic data collection inhibits the ability to (a) design relevant and context specific youth development programmes (b) monitor and evaluate their impact and quality (c) identify where changes could be made to improve the programmes. Intervention to reduce youth unemployment should not be informed by subjective analysis or political expediency but should rely on rigorous empirical data. Consequently, government ministries like MYSC should employ full time researchers. The researcher's responsibility is to conduct research on an on-going basis, collect and analyse programme data, engage in regular programme monitoring and evaluation, review and analyse the various research studies that have a bearing on the policy and programmes. This process will help facilitate:

- Up-to-date information on the nature of youth unemployment.
- Insights into why programmes succeed or fail.
- Policy recommendation guided by rigorous and unbiased empirical evidence.
- Innovation and creativity
- Stakeholder engagement
- Continuous dialogue between researcher and policy makers (Lomas, 2000)

17.0 Conclusion and way forward

This paper sought to examine the causes, effects and challenges of youth unemployment in Botswana with a view to providing workable solutions. From the literature review it is clear that youth unemployment has a complex structural basis. This paper argues that the search for long lasting solutions should be anchored on research, monitoring and evaluation, youth empowerment through skills-based programmes, increased collaboration and partnerships, and creation of strong institutional structures and coordination mechanisms for effective implementation of youth employment programmes. Importantly, the research capacity of the Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture should be strengthened. Research evidence will help inform youth employment policy and programme improvement in Botswana.

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