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Botswana's Success: The Critical Role of Identity-Based Democracy

Hassan Mudane, Istanbul Ticaret University

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*"We do acknowledge we are no longer the poorest of the poor.
But we don't accept that we should be totally excluded."*

--Former President of Botswana's Festus Mogae

Introduction

Why Botswana has succeeded? Why Botswana is more developed than other Sub Sahara African Countries? These are the central questions that this paper addresses. It is informative and analytical as well as appeals to the more informed policy analysts and students by analyzing and discussing key issues that feature in this paper. It invites political analysts to examine the issues discussed in this paper by showing how identity based democracy is the key casual factor for Botswana's success. The type of research that will be used in this paper is based on qualitative research. I will examine the phenomenon through critical evaluations in the literature review. However, the purpose of this paper is to identify the critical role of identity based democracy in Botswana's success. This shall lead to the following objective: To critically evaluate the literature on the democratization process in Africa. I begin with a brief history of Botswana (Section 1), and discussion of the literature review about the democratization process in Africa (Section 2), and then look briefly at why Botswana has succeeded, and how Botswana escaped the resource curse (Section 3, 4).

Brief History of Botswana

It is over 51 years ago since Botswana gained her independence (in 1966) and became an independent African country. The former British Protectorate of Bechuanaland (Botswana); adopted its new name upon its independence. It is a landlocked, semi-arid country, covering 581 730 km square, located in the Southern part of the continent and shared border with Zambia and Zimbabwe in the north east, Namibia in the North West, and South Africa in the south east. And it is a small country of two million people. Over the past five decades of political stability, good governance and robust economic growth and natural resource management helped to secure their economic development, supported by the discovery of diamond. It is now an upper-middle income country, after being one of the poorest countries in Africa.¹

As Beaulier (2010) noted the indigenous people in Botswana are culturally and ethnically homogeneity. In this homogeneous environment, tribal chiefs were highly respected. The chief determined whether land should be allocated to hunting, farming, or residence. Put it another way, the chief served as executive of the tribe. The chief formulated economic policy, resolved conflicts within the tribe, and managed external conflicts with other tribes. Despite his immense political power, the chief was regarded as an equal to his people. Before the colonial power (Britain) came in Botswana, the people were divided into several administratively autonomous groups that shared similar culture. Each group was led by a king (Kgosi) who dominated its political affairs. (Samatar, 1997).

The king (Kgosi) had full authority over the village. Relative to other African tribes, Botswana's tribalism was quite tolerant of dissent. Kgotlas (A chieftaincy system in which the chief and community leaders discuss issues of concern in a neutral setting) created a political connection between the chief and his people; they also had an important economic connection with their chief. The Kgosi's political authority was cemented by his control over large herds of cattle. Cattle were the principal form of wealth. Because of the semi-arid environment of Botswana, cattle were the main source of livelihood. Without access to cattle a person was assured of destitution. According to Samatar (1997), the king (Kgosi) loaned his cattle to both the chiefs, headmen and members of his subjects. Those who kept the cattle of the Kgosi lived off its output but were deprived of access to it when they lost the favour of the Kgosi. As such, this patron client system ensured the loyalty of the subjects.

When it comes to decision making, according to Samatar (1997), the Kgosi consulted with his chiefs before he made any decisions, despite his unchallenged authority and power. The

Kgosi and his advisors usually aired the issues and reached an agreement before the Kgosi's proposal was 'debated' in the Kgotla. It is one of the crucial institutions in guaranteeing some level of equality between the chief and his subjects.

The Botswana's economy is one of the most robust on the continent, dominated by the discovery of diamond. Since its independence from Great Britain, it has maintained functioning democratic institutions, good governance with less corruption, regular election, and maintained one of the highest economic growth rates in the world.ⁱⁱ Because of these achievements, Botswana has become the democratic developmental model for Africa. However, I argue that if the colonial powers were knew of Botswana's diamond before granting its independence, the narrative about Botswana today will be different. According to Beaulier (2010), without the [Natural] resources to take on... the British simply left Bechuanaland alone and hoped for no military conflicts.

The literature review

I begin with looking back to what the scholars said about the democratization process in Africa. Following Huntington's (1991) notion of the 'third wave of democratisation, it is observed that there has been a resurgence of liberal democratic ideals. This has meant the opening up of the political sphere to ensure regular free and fair elections; the enjoyment of civil liberties in the form of freedom of association, assembly, and expression; the upholding of the rule of law and the absence of human rights abuses; and the existence of independent bodies within civil society to hold government accountable. Moreover, since the 1990s, elections have become the primary method of regime change in most of Africa and there has been a movement away from one party to multi-party governments and towards the consolidation and deepening of democracy. The latter entails, among other things, popular participation, political openness, free choice, equal competition, transparency and accountability in government. (Maudeni, 2005)

According to Mukandala (2001), in 1995, Professor Nzongola Ntalaja in his introductory chapter of State and Democracy in Africa was very optimistic about the future of democracy in Africa. He said:

"Since 1988, the people of Africa have risen to replace one-party and military dictatorships with multi-party democracy."

Africa in this paper refers to the regions of 'Sub-Saharan Africa.' It is a region of great cultural and geographic diversity. But with a few exceptions, like Botswana, Mauritius, and

South Africa, countries in the region share the common fate of being among the poorest in the world. In the context of the global economy, they are excluded. Various explanations have been provided for this miserable state of affairs. This paper takes a critical look at the democratization process in the continent.

The contemporary elections and democratization in Africa is still not wide compared to that of southern Europe and Latin America. As Hyden (2002) pointed out, “Africa had its first wave of democratization in the late 1950s as countries engaged in struggles for national independence.” But the history of elections in Africa started even before in the late 1950. As Staffan (2006) noted “In 1848, there was a parliamentary election in Senegal. ... A few ‘assimilated’ Africans in Senegal were able to vote for a deputy, a parliamentary representative to the French national assembly.”

However, one of the very few comparative studies of the pre- and post independence elections in Africa shows that the few elections held before 1945 were highly exclusive affairs conducted among small elites in a few major cities. (Staffan, 2006). There were elections to legislative councils in the former British colonies, including Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone and Zambia took place in the 1920s. It took until the 1950s for the same to happen in, for instance, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda.

According Collier (2010), elections are conventionally regarded as the institutional mechanism at the core of democracy. The discipline of acquiring power through an election is assumed to make government accountable to citizens, and thereby to confer legitimacy. The absence of contested elections in communist regimes was seen as their defining deficiency... and the fall of the Soviet Union was followed by a clear expansion in the use of elections across a swathe of autocracies in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Election is one of the most effective methods which can demonstrate the realization of rule by the people, and in fostering democratization in Africa. As Staffan, (1996) noted “elections in newly democratizing countries do not signal the completion of the transition to democracy but rather foster liberalization and have a self-reinforcing power that promotes increased democracy in Africa’s political regimes. Elections also facilitate the institutionalization of and deepening of actual civil liberties in the society and are a causal variable in democratization.”

However, this paper will reinforce Staffan’s understanding about elections in Africa. But no scholar can denied that elections in Africa have in fact had a causal impact, improving the

quality of democracy there. The process of holding an regular series of competitive elections, participatory, and legitimate not only improve the quality of democracy but also has positive impacts on the spread and strengthening of civil liberties and democracy in the African society.

Thus, over the past five decades, Africa's preoccupation with [democratization process] and development has had only little success. Most Africans are worse off than they were, corruption, bad governance, and security problems are everywhere. According to Claude Ake (1996), many studies have suggested causes for these problems are colonialism, corruption, insufficient technical assistance, unequal exchange in trade, and incompetent management. He believes that political conditions are the greatest obstacle to [Africa's democratization process] and development.

My argument suggests, Sub Sahara African countries which are ethnically diverse societies need identity based democracy that is distinctive in having a strong emphasis on political restraints relative to electoral competition. This type of democracy is rare, but it does exist. An example is Botswana, a country rich in diamonds. A notable aspect of this has been that all public investment projects have been required to meet a minimum rate of return. Collier (2010) noted "The clear evidence that this has been enforced is that a very large amount of surplus funds has been accumulated in foreign assets." However, this type of democracy in Botswana thus stands in contrast to past democracy in Nigeria: the two have had a radically different balance between electoral competition and checks and balances. They have also had radically different growth outcomes: Botswana has transformed itself into a middle-income country, decisively escaping the bottom billion. Indeed, for a long period it achieved the world's fastest growth rate.

The case in Botswana is always different than other sub-Saharan African countries. It has been one of the few that has sustained democratic politics during the last five decades. It has challenged the fallacy of international thinking that held electoral democracy was only achievable in Western world. Thus, is identity based democracy, therefore, the key determining factor for Botswana's success? In some cases, it is clearly central, as in Botswana. Identity based democracy in this paper refers to the chieftainship system in Botswana which is based on some rules of democracy such as regular election, rule of law, and culture of good governance. In the next section, will analyse why Botswana has succeeded? Identity based democracy factor will explain it more.

Why Botswana has succeeded?

The debate over why some countries are rich and others are poor uproar on. Each theory has some explanatory power; and yet, every theory has its weakness. As Mankiw (1995) pointed out, our traditional econometric tools struggle to sort out the causes of economic growth and development because our models are constrained by multicollinearity, simultaneity, and degrees of freedom problems. Rodrik (2003) recognizes this problem of econometric evidence. According to him, if we concentrate too much on aggregate macroeconomic data, we will fail to appreciate the outliers. (Beaulier, 2010: 3).

Botswana achieved its independence from Britain in 1966, more than 50 years ago and much has changed in the country. This paper examines whether identity based democracy has led to improvements in society's well being, in terms of socio-economic and political transformation. After its independence, it has adopted a non-racial, multiparty democracy, parliamentary, with an executive president elected by parliament. Botswana adopted a multiparty democratic system operating within the framework of a constitution, and affords all citizens equal rights. It has majoritarian electoral system, first-past-the-post electoral system for both Local and National Government. There are no provinces in the country and has a single tier local government system, divided into small districts. At least there are 10 district councils in the rural areas, and two city councils, five town councils, and one township authority in an urban area (CLG Forum 2008)ⁱⁱⁱ. However, Botswana has been widely viewed as an African Miracle with respect to good governance and economic growth.

As a landlocked country in the sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana should not be growing; it has been one of the highest economic growth rates in the world for the past five decades. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2003), suggest that Botswana's success can be attributed to Botswana's 'good institutions,' but this explanation begs the question of why Botswana adopted its 'good institutions' in the first place.

To understand why the 'good institutions' were established in Botswana; we should look back to the history of Botswana. When Botswana gained its independence ... it entered the global system as one of the poorest states in the world. The country's crises of underdevelopment, the impact of HIV/AIDS, inequality were exacerbated by its geography—semi-desert land and land-locked. In addition, like all countries in the [Continent] the country inherited a monocrop economy with its associated vulnerability to the vicissitudes in the prices of raw materials. (Klay, 2015). This begs the question how did she overcome?

According to AJR (2003), the best account of Botswana's development is that, Great Britain's relationship with Bechuanaland (Botswana) was a key factor in Botswana's development. Moreover, he argued that since Botswana was a British protectorate, Great Britain left behind the 'good institutions' of private property and the rule of law. According to him, Botswana's success can be explained by the following factors:

- A. Botswana possessed relatively inclusive pre-colonial institutions, placing constraints on political elites.
- B. The effect of British colonialism on Botswana was minimal, and did not destroy inclusive pre-colonial institutions.
- C. Following independence, maintaining and strengthening the institution of private property was in the economic interests of the elite.
- D. Botswana is rich in diamonds. This resource wealth created enough rents that no group wanted to challenge the status quo at the expense of "rocking the boat."
- E. Botswana's success was reinforced by a number of critical decisions made by the post-independence leaders, particularly Presidents Khama and Masire.

This explanation sounds good but it does not give a good explanation for Botswana's development. Again, there is no much empirical support for the argument that British colonialism was a benign factor in Botswana's development. Thus, this paper is inspired by the first factor of the AJR's explanation for Botswana's success. By the following analytic question can tell it more.

Why western democracy does not work well in Sub-Sahara African Countries? There is a powerful factor which is 'ethnic divisions.' A society which is ethnically diverse, can easily adopt identity based democracy rather than western democracy. My argument suggests western's democracy demands unified national identity to work well. But if you look at most of the Sub Saharan African Countries, for example, in Botswana we do not see a unified national identity rather than we see a deferent identity groups. Put it another way, citizens of United States identify themselves with the national name. Other side, citizens of the most Sub Sahara African countries identify themselves with their tribal names than national identity. Therefore, is identity based democracy can explain it more for Botswana's success?

Many factors related to Botswana's successes are non-replicable rather than replicable, and therefore cannot be copied. Among the non-replicable factors that have played significant role in Botswana's success are its distinctive chieftainship political system, which is based on

the political dominance of a single identity group. I argue that this type of chieftainship system with some rules of democracy such as election, rule of law, good governance, led the country (Botswana) into successful one. Chieftainship system in this paper refers to identity based democracy system. Botswana is a different to most other Sub-Sahara African countries. Since its independence in 1966, it has been politically stable, with a multiparty democracy. However, her success is not due to a single factor but to a combination of many factors. I argued that the Botswana's maintenance of identity based democracy which is based on some rules of democracy such as regular election, rule of law, inclusive institution, and culture of good governance could be the key factor in Botswana's success. Also it has benefited from its ethnic homogeneity.

The liberal democracy that Botswana espouses can effectively take place when there is effective political competition. For it to take place there must be political parties and free and fair elections. To understanding Botswana's electoral system, Maundeni (2015) noted "Since the independence elections of 1965, Botswana has held nine successive elections, in an open, free and fair atmosphere." Botswana liberal democratic development state is anchored on several pillars. At the core is the state's commitment to human development.

As Klay (2015) argued that "A development ideology was developed that prioritized human development as a national project. ... Effective and efficient public institutions were designed. Operated by professional bureaucrats, the public institutions that are involved in development governance play critical roles in the formulation of the national development plan, the elaboration of the development ideology, the integration of development and financial planning, the management of conflicts, the management of natural resources, especially diamonds, and the delivery of public goods such as education." But [this success achieved by Botswana] is funded by domestic capital, foreign aid and foreign direct investment.

Botswana has made great success in terms of socioeconomic development for the last five decades. As Beaulier (2010) pointed out "Relative to sub-Saharan African averages, most economic and social indicators reflect outstanding living conditions for the average Botswana citizen." Botswana achieved high progress toward improving social well being, and much has changed in Botswana since that time. Sarkin, (2010) noted since independence in 1966, Botswana has enjoyed much success, especially in comparison to many post-colonial African nations. It has evolved from one of the poorest countries in the world to a symbol of political

stability, economic growth, international investment, and development in Africa. It has been politically stable, with a multiparty democracy.

When Botswana has discovered its Diamond, it has played a major role in the story of the ‘African Miracle’ over the last five decades. Hillbom, (2008) argues that “Without the discovery of diamonds, it is unlikely that Botswana would have been able to prosper to such an extent.” Since its independence, Botswana has enjoyed much success, especially in comparison to many post-colonial African nations. It has evolved from one of the poorest countries in the world to a symbol of political stability, economic growth, international investment, and development in Africa. Thus, the international community has spent several decades praising the country of Botswana for these achievements.

Therefore, Sarkin (2010) noted that “There are many reasons for Botswana’s success, some of them stem from Botswana’s unique history and context, a few are coincidental, and several are the by product of efforts by the country’s leaders.” The first Botswana’s president Khama, his contribution to the Botswana’s success is obvious, he did great job to his country, and focused on accountability and political consultation, pushes to de-racialize the political system, responsible fiscal policy, and his contingency planning is all achievements emblematic of his successful and popular leadership. The government has increased investment through —responsibly handled dealings with foreign corporations and management of state enterprises.¶84 Botswana’s leadership has ensured that it has utilized the wealth afforded by its natural resources wisely and accomplished great economic feats. Sarkin (2015).

However, there are several factors that explain for Botswana’s success. According to Klay (2015), one of them is the development plan which articulates the goals, the targets and the ways for achieving them. Moreover, the corps of professional civil servants underscores the importance of expertise, efficiency and effectiveness in development governance. The country’s diamonds, the mainstay of its economy, are managed very well. The emphasis on inclusivity, including collaboration with the private sector, has helped galvanize both the citizenry at large and business as major stakeholders in the development process.

In sum, Botswana should have many experiences and practical lessons on democracy to share with the other Sub-Sahara African Countries, including good governance and democracy. Botswana achieved socioeconomic development because of its culture of good governance, identity based democracy, discovery of diamond, and good institutions whereas

we do not see such kind of achievements or practices in other sub Sahara African countries. According to Iimmi (2006), Botswana's success story has demonstrated that four aspects of governance are particularly important for natural resource management. These practices include: 1) voice and accountability; 2) government effectiveness; 3) market friendly regulation and 4) anticorruption policies.

How Botswana escaped the Resource Curse

Since the 1970's developing countries with resource rich have consistently underperformed resource poor countries when it comes to economic growth, income inequality and good governance. According to Wienthal (2006), it has been well established that – controlling for income – the more intense a country's reliance on mineral exports, the more slowly its economy grows. However, from 1960 to 1990, the GDP per capita of mineral rich countries increased by 1.7% compared to the 2.5-3.5% growth of mineral poor countries. (Meijia et al, 2012).

Though large number studies have found strong evidence that resource abundance leads to poor or unequal growth and political instability, there are exceptions to this rule. Botswana is case in point. Though the country is one of the world's largest producers of diamonds, it is one of the few countries that have managed to turn its resource into a blessing rather than a curse. According to Meijia et al (2012), Botswana went from being one of the 25 poorest countries in the world to becoming an upper-middle income economy in 1998, reaching a per capita GDP of 9,200 USD in 2004. Thus, the question that then presents itself is how did Botswana escape the pitfalls of the resource curse, ensure stable growth, and save its wealth for use by future generations? In spite of the many challenges associated to resource abundance, Botswana has managed to overcome some of challenges usually posed by the "resource curse".

Meijia and Castel (2012) argued that "Botswana's successful resource wealth management and its avoidance of the resource curse was a three-pronged approach: first, Botswana pursued economic diversification to render it less dependent on the volatility of the mining sector; second, the country de-linked expenditure from revenue and finally it invested surplus revenue for use by future generations. Third, the dynamics of Botswana's policies will be further explored; demonstrating that at the center of the country's success laid its ability to avoid the usual pitfalls that threaten countries benefiting from a resource boom."

Botswana has established its independent anti-corruption authority to encourage anti-corruption measures in 1994, for instance, the Directorate of Corruption and Economic Crime has the authority to report corruption cases directly to the president. Meijia et al (2012) argued that ‘the constitution also makes the attorney general independent of the government and politicians. It is the combination of Botswana’s fiscal sustainability measures and its culture of good governance that have created the conditions necessary for the country to turn its natural resource into a blessing.’

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explain Botswana's success. The analysis has raised some questions related to Botswana's Success. Why Botswana has succeeded? Why Botswana is more developed than other Sub Sahara African countries? But the primary aim has been to identify the critical role of identity based democracy in Botswana's success. To search this, I went through the literature related to Botswana's development. First, I found that Botswana's success is not due to a single factor but to a combination of many factors. The Botswana's maintenance of identity based democracy which is based on some rules of democracy such as regular election, inclusive institution, rule of law, and culture of good governance could be the key factor in Botswana's success. Also it has benefited from its ethnic homogeneity. Second, Botswana is more developed than other Sub Sahara African Countries because of its practice of identity based democracy, culture of good governance, inclusive institution, discovery of diamond whereas we do not see such kind of practices or factors in other Sub Sahara African Countries.

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Notes

ⁱ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/botswana/overview> (Accessed in April, 2017)

ⁱⁱ See generally Lewis, supra note 38 (reviewing Botswana's achievements as well as the policies that the author proposes helped Botswana secure these achievements).

ⁱⁱⁱ Commonwealth Local Government Forum. 2008. <http://www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/clgf/file/countries/Botswana.pdf>, accessed 05 May 2017.