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TO AFRICAN POLITICS

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**AN INTRODUCTION  
TO AFRICAN POLITICS**

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# Chapter Thirty



## BOTSWANA'S INDEPENDENCE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

### Introduction

The Republic of Botswana shares borders with South Africa to the south, Namibia to the west and north, Zimbabwe to the east, and Zambia to the north. The British declared a protectorate over Botswana, then known as Bechuanaland, in 1885, at the invitation of a prominent indigenous local chief. Prior to this, the territory was inhabited by various peoples ruled by different chiefs, coexisting as independent entities. Initially, missionaries were appointed as Assistant Commissioners in the Protectorate, later replaced by English-speaking South Africans with police or clerical backgrounds, known as Resident Magistrates.

South Africa gained virtual control over the territory through the Statute of Union Act (1934), prompting the British to solidify their own rule in the High Commission Territories to prevent transfer to the Union. Consequently, a form of indirect rule was implemented for governance.

Nationalism in Botswana was relatively mild and did not lead to widespread mobilization for rapid independence. The transition to independence was more strongly driven by colonial authorities than nationalist leaders. Seretse Khama emerged as a consensus figure for the handover of power. Although from an aristocratic family of the largest tribe among the Tswana (the Bamangwato), his marriage to an English woman cost him his title to the throne. Nevertheless, he maintained high traditional status and was not viewed as a traditional chief. Educated and a successful businessman in ranching, he garnered support from the expatriate community and colonial authorities. In 1962, he was appointed to a senior post in a trainee-minister system. His moderate Bechuanaland Democratic Party (later Botswana Democratic Party), formed in opposition to the Bechuanaland People's Party advocating radical nationalism, quickly became the dominant force in the Legislative Council, winning 28 of 31 elected seats in 1965. Independence was achieved in 1966, again with minimal popular mobilization and Khama became the country's first President.

### Development of the Constitution

Although British interest and direct administration in Botswana were limited, a rudimentary form of governmental administration was established in 1891. Upon Botswana coming under British protection, administration was delegated to the Government of the Cape of Good Hope, a British colony at the time, now part of South Africa.

By a British Order in Council of 9th May 1891, made under the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890, the High Commissioner appointed to administer Botswana was granted powers for the Administration of Justice. The High Commissioner, based in Cape Town, South Africa, issued a Proclamation on 10th June 1891, providing for a complete system of administration, establishing courts and appointing various officials. Successive High Commissioners administered the territory from Cape Town and later from other South African towns. Often, legislation for Botswana was adapted from that of South Africa.

Day-to-day administration was largely conducted by local chiefs, as the British sought to minimize expenditure. They retained the indigenous system of rule, notably the Kgotla, a traditional assembly where chiefs met with community members to discuss local issues.

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Over time, colonial administration began to overshadow local chiefs and the Kgotla, leading to calls for a national consultation forum. In response, the administration established the Native Advisory Council in 1919 (later renamed the African Advisory Council). It was an advisory body with no real powers, meeting annually in Mafikeng, South Africa. A European Advisory Body was established the following year to represent the white minority in the protectorate. These councils operated alongside each other until 1950 when the Joint Advisory Council, comprising eight members from each council and administration representatives, was formed. It too had advisory powers, meeting biannually to discuss matters of interest to both races.

Repeated calls by the African Advisory Council in the 1950s for elected legislative councils were disregarded by the British. With the realization of Botswana's inevitable independence, Britain announced a timetable for self-government and independence, allowing for a period of self-rule to train the populace in governance, culminating in full independence.

### **The 1963 and 1966 Constitutions**

During a conference held in Lobatse in 1963, a constitution for self-governing Botswana was agreed upon. This marked the transition from a Legislative Council to a National Assembly with thirty-two directly elected members and four specially elected members. A Prime Minister was to be elected from among the

members, and a Cabinet, chaired by the Resident Commissioner, comprised the Prime Minister and five Ministers appointed from the National Assembly. Additionally, a House of Chiefs, succeeding the African Council, was established to advise the National Assembly and the Government on customary law and related matters.

The 1963 Constitution took effect on 3rd March 1965, followed by elections where the Botswana Democratic Party (formerly the Bechuanaland Democratic Party) secured 28 of the 31 seats, with the Botswana People's Party (formerly the Bechuanaland People's Party) winning the remaining three seats. Later, the 1965 Constitution was modified and adopted during the Bechuanaland Independence Conference in London in February 1966, attended by the newly-elected government, opposition leaders, chiefs' representatives, and British officials. The Constitution was enacted through the Botswana Independence Order of 1966.

Unlike some states' constitutions adopted through referendums or elected constituent assemblies, the Botswana Constitution of 1966 follows the typical prototype designed by the Colonial Office in London for former British colonies. Although subject to several amendments, the basic framework and structure established by the original independence Constitution remain largely unchanged and in force today. Despite this, Botswana has emerged as Africa's foremost example of an open, transparent and liberal multi-party democracy. Like many African constitutions, the 1966 Constitution empowers a strong executive with considerable latitude for personalized governance.

### **Fundamental Human Rights**

It is worth noting that besides the Constitution, two other sources contribute significantly to fundamental rights in Botswana. The first is common law. Prior to the enactment and implementation of the 1966 Constitution with its Bill of Rights, human rights protection primarily relied on common law and statutes. However, during the colonial era, there was minimal regard for human rights. In anticipation of Botswana's inevitable independence, the British established a Legislative Council for the territory in 1960. Among its initial actions was the removal of racial discrimination ingrained in the legal system since 1885. The General Law

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(Removal of Discrimination) Revision Law 1964 amended numerous laws to eliminate racially discriminatory provisions from the territory's legal framework.

Despite this progress, the human rights protections afforded by the colonial administration were limited and primarily based on common law. This body of law comprised English common law principles developed by English judges to safeguard civil liberties, along with Roman-Dutch principles applied to Botswana during the colonial period through the Cape Colony in South Africa.

**The Peaceful Transition (1966-67)**

In June 1966, Britain accepted proposals for democratic self-government in Botswana. The seat of government shifted from Mafikeng in South Africa to the newly established Gaborone in 1965. The 1965 Constitution paved the way for the first general elections and Botswana's independence on September 30, 1966. Seretse Khama, a key figure in the independence movement and the rightful claimant to the Ngwato chiefship, emerged as the first president. His leadership ensured a resounding victory for moderates, effectively sidelining radicals advocating rapid Africanization of their societies and economies, as well as traditionalists pushing for a return to chieftaincy rule. Botswana's moderation positioned it somewhat as an outlier among newly independent African nations. Just days before independence, white settlers in Rhodesia declared Unilateral Declaration of Independence. In response, the UN, upon the Organization of African Unity's request, imposed sanctions. These sanctions, if enforced, would have severely impacted Botswana's economy, closely linked with that of Rhodesia and South Africa.

Following independence, President Khama explicitly stated his stance on the division between the "new men" and chiefs. Addressing the Botswana Teachers' Union in 1966, he emphasized the dangers of exclusively tribal thinking in the face of rapid social change: "I appreciate that many of our people at this time of rapid social change are bundled into positions which make them look around for familiar reference points. They take comfort in the sense of identity which they derive from family and hence from tribe. This is understandable but it becomes dangerous when it leads people to think in exclusively tribal terms. It becomes a threat to the stability and security of our state when it is carried to the point where a man in a responsible position thinks of himself as a tribesman before he thinks of himself as a Botswana" (Olufemi: 2003, p.76).

**Threats to Botswana's Stability**

Against the backdrop of Botswana's independence, South Africa was embroiled in a struggle for majority rule. Botswana sought support from its northern neighbors to aid guerrilla forces, but this assistance came with significant costs to the supporting regimes. The influx of South African refugees posed ongoing challenges for Botswana until African victory was achieved. While Botswana could not turn away refugees, their presence made the country vulnerable to actions by the South African Defence Force (SADF) commandos. Additionally, there were concerns about the refugees' potential to destabilize Botswana, as they might align with factions seeking a more confrontational stance against South Africa. The presence of armed ANC guerrillas among the refugees added to these concerns, potentially fueling conflict.

**Botswana's Economic Development**

Following the discovery of diamonds in the late 1960s, Botswana underwent rapid economic growth over three decades, emerging as a model of economic management among developing nations. At independence in 1966, Botswana was among the world's poorest

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nations. Decades of colonial rule had led to neglect, with minimal development of communication and infrastructure aside from a railway line. Education was lacking, resulting in high illiteracy rates and a scarcity of qualified professionals. The predominantly rural population relied on traditional agriculture, particularly cattle farming, as the main economic activity. The modern sector, centered around the Lobatse cattle abattoir and export of associated products to South Africa, was limited.

During the first decade post-independence (1966-75), characterized by the Transitional Plan and the initial two national development plans, Botswana began to emerge from poverty. Core governmental institutions were established, along with policies and plans for national development. The discovery and exploitation of copper-nickel in Selebi-phikwe and diamonds in Orapa were significant economic milestones during this period. Other contributing factors included the end of a mid-1960s drought, access to the European Community (EC) market for beef at favorable prices, renegotiation of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) agreement, and a strategic focus on capital-intensive mining ventures to drive rapid economic growth.

Mineral revenues and foreign aid were channeled into investments in education, healthcare and physical and social infrastructure, laying the groundwork for future economic expansion. The development of major mines also facilitated the establishment of new towns and infrastructure, providing a boost to domestic demand through construction activities.

**Botswana's Relationship with South Africa**

Botswana's political and economic relationship with South Africa, as well as its geographical proximity, significantly influenced its growth trajectory, especially in its early stages of development. Until 1976, Botswana's monetary policies were directly controlled by South Africa through its membership in the Rand Monetary Area. South African companies played a major role in extracting Botswana's mineral reserves, contributing to the country's economic development. However, the dominance of South African exports within the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) may have hindered the growth of Botswana's manufacturing sector.

Politically, Botswana opposed apartheid in South Africa, leading to some destabilization due to cross-border attacks on ANC cadres based in Botswana. However, Botswana did not provide the same level of support or experience the same scale of destruction as other countries in the region, which may have contributed to its comparatively higher growth rates. President Mogae emphasized Botswana's pragmatic economic policies in maintaining trade and business relations with South Africa despite disagreements over apartheid policies.

The extent to which Botswana's relationship with South Africa can be characterized as one of dependency is debatable. In the early years, Botswana appeared to be in a semi-dependent relationship with South Africa, particularly due to the role of South African mining capital. South African capital benefited from this relationship through profits, cheap labor from Botswana, and a market for manufactured exports with limited competition.

However, despite this semi-dependent relationship, Botswana achieved growth rates surpassing those of South Africa, resulting in higher per capita income and better development indicators. This can be attributed to Botswana's unique accumulation trajectory, which allowed elites to pursue a narrow-based growth path that may have benefited from the semi-dependent relationship with South Africa, although not necessarily benefiting the entire population. Over time, as Botswana strengthened its economy, it has gradually emerged from this semi-

dependent relationship with South Africa.

### **Political Independence from South Africa**

Botswana's quest for independence involved two distinct dimensions: political independence from Britain and reduction of political and economic dependence on South Africa. South Africa had long sought to incorporate Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland into its territory, posing a challenge to Botswana's sovereignty. Achieving political independence from South Africa was imperative, especially considering Botswana's multi-racial and democratic political system, which stood in opposition to the apartheid ideology of the South African government.

The concept of economic independence in Botswana had both internal and external dimensions, as outlined in the National Development Plan 6 (1985-1991). Internally, it involved initiatives such as training and localization of skills, economic diversification and mobilization of internal resources for development. Externally, economic independence meant diversifying communication networks and establishing greater links with other countries to diversify markets for goods, imports, technology, aid and expertise.

While Botswana's economy remained integrated with that of South Africa, efforts were made to diversify outlets and reduce reliance on its southern neighbor. Initiatives such as constructing roads and telecommunication infrastructure, promoting regional cooperation through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and seeking partnerships with other friendly countries aimed to enhance economic independence.

From a nation-building perspective, Botswana made significant progress by establishing an independent government structure and fostering a multi-racial political system. Internationally, Botswana gained recognition as an active political mediator in regional and African conflicts. Partnerships with countries like Sweden not only provided political support but also contributed to development assistance activities, furthering Botswana's objectives of independence and growth.

### **Economic Independence from South Africa**

Botswana's pursuit of economic independence aligns with its broader development objectives, as well as with the goals of Swedish assistance. However, operationalizing the concept of economic independence proves challenging, as it lacks a universally accepted definition. Historically, the idea of economic independence emerged during a period when trade relations between the First and Third World were viewed as exploitative. Consequently, many associated increased economic independence with reduced trade ties with the First World and an inward-looking development strategy. Additionally, the pressure to impose UN sanctions against apartheid-era South Africa added a unique dimension to Botswana's quest for economic independence.

For a small country like Botswana, an inward-looking development strategy was not feasible. While regional initiatives like the Southern African Development Cooperation Conference (SADCC) and the Preference Trade Area (PTA) offered alternative trading areas, they failed to establish effective economic cooperation mechanisms. Currencies remained non-convertible, and attempts to create alternative clearing mechanisms for regional trade were unsuccessful. As a result, severing or significantly reducing economic ties with South Africa proved challenging for Botswana.

Instead, Botswana has adopted a more pragmatic approach to economic independence, focusing on reducing the risk associated with dependency on a single product or market, and

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diversifying production and markets to mitigate the impact of any single product or market failure on the domestic economy. With the prospect of democratic change in South Africa, regional dynamics have shifted, leading to a policy change within SADCC, now renamed SADC, towards integrating South Africa into broader regional cooperation frameworks. Consequently, Botswana views economic growth as best fostered through closer economic integration with South Africa rather than through pursuing greater economic independence alone.

### **Development Assistance through Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) with Respect to Equity**

Botswana's welfare programs represent a significant effort by the government to address the needs of its population, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare and agriculture. The provision of free education from primary to university level, subsidized health services and free water access demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that basic needs are met for all citizens. Additionally, initiatives such as drought relief programs and subsidies for farmers contribute to food security and livelihood support, especially during challenging times.

Special programs targeting marginalized groups, such as the Basarwa and the elderly, highlight the government's efforts to address specific socio-economic challenges faced by vulnerable populations. The Arable Lands Development Programme, Remote Area Dwellers Programme, and the Destitute Program aim to provide support and opportunities for those most in need, promoting inclusion and social cohesion.

However, despite these welfare initiatives, income disparities persist in Botswana, reflecting the challenges of achieving equitable development in an economy heavily reliant on revenue from diamond production. While the diamond industry generates significant revenue for the country, it offers limited direct employment and income opportunities for the broader population. The lack of backward and forward linkages in the diamond sector means that few local businesses benefit from its activities, contributing to income inequality and limited economic diversification.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond welfare programs alone. Strategies to promote economic diversification, develop local industries and create employment opportunities outside of the diamond sector are essential for achieving more equitable growth and reducing income disparities in Botswana.

### **Development Assistance Through Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) with Respect to Growth**

Botswana's development trajectory after independence was greatly facilitated by foreign assistance and later by revenues from diamond mining. This external support allowed the country to overcome initial challenges related to infrastructure development, human capital and public administration capacity. With access to foreign aid and expertise, Botswana was able to accelerate its development process, bypassing the need to wait for domestic capacity to be built.

One of the key advantages of foreign assistance was its role in enabling Botswana to deliver improved social services to its population. Investments in sectors like health, education and water supply, which are crucial for human development and well-being, were made possible with external support. However, it is important to note that while foreign aid played a significant role, Botswana's own resources, particularly revenues from diamond mining, were instrumental in sustaining these investments over the long term.

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The rapid growth of diamond revenues allowed Botswana to absorb substantial aid inflows and effectively utilize external assistance for development purposes. This underscores the interdependence between economic growth and the effective use of foreign aid. Without sustained economic growth, it would have been challenging for Botswana to finance recurrent expenditures in social sectors solely from domestic resources.

In essence, Botswana's development experience highlights the symbiotic relationship between external assistance, economic growth and long-term development. While foreign aid provided crucial support in the initial stages of development, sustained economic growth fueled by domestic resources ultimately became the foundation for Botswana's continued progress and prosperity.

**Conclusion**

Botswana's remarkable economic growth since independence has indeed been one of the most striking success stories on the African continent. Several key factors have contributed to this growth trajectory:

**Political Stability:** Botswana has maintained a stable political environment since gaining independence in 1966. The country has been governed by a multi-party democratic system, which has provided a conducive environment for economic development and investment.

**Good Governance:** Botswana has been characterized by good governance practices, including low levels of corruption, strong institutions and the rule of law. This has helped create an enabling environment for business and investment, fostering economic growth.

**Sound Economic Policies:** The government of Botswana has pursued prudent economic policies, including fiscal discipline, prudent monetary management and openness to trade and investment. These policies have contributed to macroeconomic stability and sustained economic growth.

**Natural Resources:** Botswana's discovery and exploitation of diamond reserves have been a major driver of economic growth. The revenue generated from diamond mining has provided the government with resources to invest in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, contributing to overall development.

**Investment in Human Capital:** Despite some challenges in human development indicators lagging behind economic growth, Botswana has made significant investments in education, healthcare and social welfare programs. These investments have helped improve the quality of life and contribute to long-term sustainable development.

**Regional Stability:** Botswana has benefited from its geographical location, surrounded by relatively stable countries. This has facilitated trade and regional cooperation, contributing to economic growth and stability.

However, it is important to note that Botswana still faces challenges, including income inequality, high unemployment rates and limited diversification of the economy beyond diamond mining. Addressing these challenges will be essential for ensuring more inclusive growth and sustainable development in the future.