

COUNTRY PROFILE The Republic of Botswana

Botswana's economic growth rate has outpaced the economic growth of Asian countries, and the World Bank cites Botswana as one of the world's great economic success stories. However, the growth in the economy has not always been matched with development with an estimated 40 per cent of the population still living below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 a day. Botswana regularly features as one of the most unequal countries in the world, but scores well on such indices as transparency, human rights and least corrupt countries.

SUMMARY FACTS

Population: 1.9 Million (UN, 2008), UK: 61.2 million	GDP per capita: US\$6,108 (UN, 2008), UK: US\$43,544.
Capital: Gaborone	Monetary unit: 1 Pula = 100 thebe
Area: 581,730 sq km (361,470 sq miles), UK: 243,610 sq km (94,060 sq miles)	Main exports: Diamonds, Copper, Nickel, Soda Ash, Beef, Textiles
Major languages: English and Setswana	CO2 emissions share of world total: less than 0.1%: UK: >2%
Major religions: Christianity	Population without access to an improved water source: 4% (UN, 2006), UK: 0%
Life expectancy at birth: 54 years (UN, 2008), UK: 79 years	Population using improved sanitation: 47% (UN, 2006), UK: 100%
Under-five mortality rate: 31 per 1,000 live births (UN, 2008), UK: 6 per 1,000 live births	Government: Botswana Democratic Party
HIV prevalence: 23.9% aged 15-49 (UN, 2007), UK: 0.2% aged 15-49	President: Seretse Khama Ian Khama
Adult Literacy Rate: 83% ages 15 and older (UN, 2008), UK: >99%	Year Women received right to vote: 1965: UK: 1918, 1928 (equal rights)

Sources: UN Statistics, UNICEF (2009)



History

The San, a hunter-gatherer tribe, have inhabited the Kalahari Desert for over 20,000 years. The Tsodilo Hills in the north-west contain over 4,500 rock paintings created by the San. Between **AD 200** and **500** Bantu-speaking farmers started to appear in the region from the north and east.

In **1885** the lands south of the Molopo River became the British Crown Colony of Bechuanaland and were attached to the Cape Colony, while the area to the north became the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland. The capital of the protectorate was established at Mafeking, even though this town was actually in South Africa. Chiefs were granted tribal 'reserve', a jurisdiction over all black residents and the authority to collect taxes.

In **1923**, Chief Khama III died and was succeeded by his brother Tshekedi Khama who became regent of the clan as the Chief's son Seretse was too young to rule. After World War II Seretse Khama went to England where he married an Englishwoman. Tshekedi Khama was furious at this breach of tribal custom and Seretse was exiled until **1956** when he renounced his right to power.

In **1955** it became apparent that Britain was preparing to relinquish its authority in Bechuanaland. In **1962**, Seretse Khama formed the Bechuanaland Democratic Party (BDP). The BDP formulated a schedule for independence, drawing on support from local chiefs and traditional Batswana. They promoted the transfer of the capital to Gaborone, drafted a new constitution and set up a countdown to independence to allow a peaceful transfer of power. General elections were held in **1965** and Seretse Khama was elected president. In September **1966**, the country, now called the Republic of Botswana, gained independence.

Botswana was economically transformed by the discovery of diamonds near Orapa in **1967**. The mining concession was given to De Beers with Botswana taking 75 per cent of the profits. Seretse Khama adopted a neutral stance towards South Africa and Rhodesia during the **1970s** and **1980s** in part due to Botswana's economic dependence on these countries. Nevertheless, Khama refused to exchange ambassadors with South Africa and officially disapproved of apartheid in international circles. Botswana became a haven for refugees and anti-apartheid activists from its southern neighbour.

Since the **mid-1990s** the central government of Botswana has implemented a relocation policy, aiming to move the San out of their ancestral land on the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, an area the size of Denmark, into newly created settlements. The government's official reason for adopting the policy was that their agricultural practices were not compatible with preserving wildlife resources in the game reserve. In **2002** a court ruling confirmed that the removal was unconstitutional and residents were wrongly evicted from their ancestral lands. Despite this ruling government measures to support the resettlement of the San back on their land have been slow, and most are still forced to reside elsewhere.

Botswana has held free and fair elections since its independence with the most recent election, its tenth, held in October **2009**. Ian Khama, the first son of Seretse Khama, was sworn in as the fourth President of Botswana after his party the BDP gained more than 45 seats in the 57 seat Parliament. Botswana is widely regarded as a success story of modern African development, with a non-racial, multiparty, democratic government that oversees the affairs of a peaceful state. Freedom of

speech, association, press and religion, as well as equal rights, are all guaranteed under the constitution.

Population

Botswana's population is small for its surface area, with most people based along the eastern corridor due to the vast area of the Kalahari Desert. The population density is just 3.2 people/km², compared to the UK's 250 people/km². Botswana's main ethnic groups are the Tswana, Kalanga, and the Basarwa. Over a third of the population is under 15 years old. The population growth rate is 1.9 per cent (as of 2009).

Due to the deteriorating economic conditions in Zimbabwe in the last 10 years, the number of Zimbabweans migrating and living in Botswana has risen into tens of thousands. This has caused concern among many Batswana due to a perception that increased competition for employment and an alleged rise in crime is the fault of Zimbabwean migrants. The legitimacy of these perceptions is difficult to assess: the global economic downturn suggests that job competition may not be the result of increasing immigration, but global factors.

Politics

The President of Botswana is both head of state and head of government. Executive power is exercised by the government. Legislative power is vested in both the Government and the Parliament. Since independence the government has been dominated by the Botswana Democratic Party. A constitutional amendment passed in 1997 made provision for the Deputy-President to succeed to the Presidency automatically in the event of the position falling vacant between elections. There is also a 15-member House of Chiefs, which has advisory powers only. There is currently some debate as to whether this institution serves any useful purpose, but given the ruling party's dependence on its rural support base no immediate change is anticipated.

According to Transparency International Botswana is currently the least corrupt country in Africa, ranking 37 out of 180 countries worldwide. The most recent elections, in 2009, were deemed free and fair by international observers.

Economy

Since independence, Botswana has had one of the fastest per capita growth rates in the world. This strong growth rate has transformed Botswana from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle-income country comparable (in terms of GDP per capita) with Russia and Turkey. The government has maintained a stable economy, despite consecutive budget deficits in 2002 and 2003, and a negligible level of foreign debt. It has stockpiled foreign exchange reserves amounting to almost two and a half years of current imports.

Debswana, the largest diamond mining company operating in Botswana, is 50 per cent owned by the government. In 2002 diamonds accounted for 77 per cent of export earnings and 40 per cent of gross domestic product. This revenue has been successfully channelled into health and education, but has little impact on employment or the distribution of wealth. There is severe unequal development between rural and urban areas, with 55 per cent of the rural population below the poverty line, while in urban areas it is 29 per cent. Botswana is the fourth most unequal country in the world. The Government announced in early 2009, that it would try and shift their economic dependence on diamonds, as they are predicted to run out in the next 20 years. Up-market tourist resorts and safaris are also an important income stream.

Civil society & trade unions

At present there are about 25 trade unions in Botswana, all of them affiliated to the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions. Trade unions in Botswana operate within the democratic system in which the government has ratified the International Labour Organisation's core conventions, including Conventions 87 (Freedom of Association) and 98 (Right to Organise).

With the exception of members of the Botswana Defence Force, Botswana Police Service, Local Police, and Prison Service, all workers have the right to join unions. However, in practice trade unions complain of difficulties in operating freely. The 2004 Trade Disputes Act is seen by unions as 'employer-favoured' and requires submitting grievances in a complex procedure which can result in strike action being declared illegal. Civil society groups have been particularly outspoken about the issue of the forced removal of the San from the Kalahari. The Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO), an umbrella organisation bringing together numerous smaller civil society groups, seeks to build the capacity of its members in the areas of advocacy, lobbying and civic education.

Botswana is a founding member of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). SADC was formed in 1980, as a loose alliance of nine majority-ruled states in Southern Africa, with the main aim of coordinating development projects in order to lessen economic dependence on the then apartheid South Africa. Botswana houses the Secretariat of SADC which is the principal executive institution and responsible for strategic planning, co-ordination and management of SADC programmes.

Achievements

1. Elections- Botswana has had 10 peaceful, democratic elections since independence. It has also been rewarded with the title of Africa's least corrupt country by Transparency International.
2. Stable Economy – Botswana has sustained strong fiscal policies and has maintained high growth rates since independence.
3. Improving Healthcare System - Botswana's health care system is one of the best in southern Africa with every person living within 15 km of a health facility. In the last 10 years the government has spent between one fifth and one third of its annual budget on health. Health care is delivered through a network of hospitals, clinics, health and mobile posts. About 90 per cent of health services are provided by the government, the other 10 per cent is private, including services run by mining sector companies, largely for their workers and dependents.

Development Challenges

1. HIV/AIDS - The greatest threat to Botswana's stability is HIV/AIDS. Botswana has the second highest HIV infection rate in the world after Swaziland (South Africa has the highest number of people living with HIV) with just under a quarter of its population infected. Although health spending is high and antiretroviral drugs are increasingly available, the effect HIV/AIDS has on Botswana's society is significant. The number of orphans and child-headed families are increasing and the effect sick workers has on the economy is substantial.
2. Climate Change –The Kalahari Desert occupies 77 per cent of Botswana's land mass leaving the country with limited supplies of fresh water, infrequent rain, and droughts becoming more frequent. The government's figures on crop yield show a significant drop in food production in the last five years. The increasing dependency

on food imports imposes higher prices, which impacts are felt by particularly by the poorest households.

3. The San's Ancestral Lands- Although recent court rulings have stated that the removal of the San from their lands was unconstitutional, little has been done to support their resettlement back on the land.

4. Lack of wealth distribution- The wealth accumulated through Debswana has brought development to urban areas, with improved roads and health facilities. However the infrastructure in rural areas is poor, with access to safe drinking water available only to a few households and a lack of health facilities in a reasonable distance of villages.

For more information on Botswana, visit the following websites:

- Government website of Botswana www.gov.bw/
- The Botswana Centre for Human Rights www.ditshwanelo.org.bw/index.html
- Botswana Public Employees Union www.bopeu.co.bw/index.php
- Botswana Tourism Board www.botswanaturism.co.bw/
- Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO) www.bocongo.org.bw