

# **OPENING SPEECH BY HIS HONOUR THE VICE PRESIDENT AND MINISTER OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

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Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to have the pleasure of opening this workshop on Development Trends in the past Twenty years of Independence in Botswana.

I am particularly pleased to see that our University continues to play an important part; not only in preparing manpower with the skills needed for development, but in carrying out research on many issues which concern us as a Government.

In 1983, it was pleasing to note the publication of a book on Botswana's Economy Since Independence. In June of 1984, I had the pleasure of opening a conference on this campus, which was concerned with Development strategies in our Southern Africa region. It is reassuring to see research scholars increasingly concerning themselves with issues of both regional and national priority.

It is extremely valuable for scholars, intellectuals, as well as ordinary citizens, to meet from time to time to discuss issues of mutual concern. It is even more valuable if such meetings could stimulate research and lead to ideas that could help us to more effectively deal with problems of both our country as well as our region.

At a time when the nation celebrates its Twentieth Anniversary of Independence, it is most appropriate for all of us to be engaged in a serious and systematic reflection on what we as a

people have achieved over the last twenty years.

Mr Chairman, let me note that unlike many former colonies or protectorates, Botswana inherited almost nothing at Independence. The public sector was dependent upon grants from the United Kingdom to balance the recurrent budget.

At independence in 1966, Botswana was one of the poorest countries in the world. The people of Botswana lived on subsistence agriculture and cattle-rearing. The country was one of the least developed with little physical and social infrastructure and communications were inadequate. The economic outlook was bleak. There seemed little hope that the country would ever become independent in even the most modest economic sense. The idea of generating domestic resources for development was unthinkable.

The lack of development at independence to a large extent directed the Government's economic policies and priorities. From the beginning, Government was led by the pressing need to devote attention to basic services for our people.

Growth in Botswana started from a very small base. Mining, cattle-rearing and the provision of government services have provided the major stimulus to economic growth and development.

The mining and beef industries were, and still remain the major contributions of the country's exports. But the manufacturing sector was very small.

The manufacturing industry has grown substantially in terms of employment creation and contribution to Gross Domestic Product. It has increased and has been growing rapidly. The growth of this sector has largely been attributed to the general favourable investment climate in Botswana. The favourable fiscal and monetary policies and direct government participation through parastatals like the Botswana Development Corporation have been geared towards providing a better

investment climate in the country. Other government policies, like the Financial Assistance Policy (FAP), which give incentives to productive entities, have also contributed to the growth of this sector.

As far as government services are concerned, most basic services for the people have been provided. For example, at the time of independence, there were inadequate schools, hospitals, roads and, of course, no university. But now all these things have been made possible through the process of development. We now have schools, hospitals and our own university. Government has made major efforts through budgetary expenditures to provide people with more equal access to education, basic health facilities, communications, transportation, water supplies and other facilities.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not here to outline developments trends in Botswana. I am here to welcome you and to support your attempts to evaluate progress in the past twenty years.

At our 20th anniversary of Independence, it is timely to assess the progress that has been made over the last 20 years. We must recognise however that 20 years of progress is not the end of our efforts. Botswana still has many problems that need to be tackled. We still have a long way to go, for example, in two of the government's major objectives of rural development and employment creation, even though the last 20 years has seen considerable progress.

Mr Chairman, I am happy to see that you intend to discuss a wide variety of topics on development and not Botswana's economy alone. We know that we cannot have sustained development unless people have a more equal chance to attain their economic and social goals. I am pleased to see that our university lecturers do not only teach, but are eager to present their research findings to the nation. Your discussions have the potential of constructively contributing to policy making.

I am also pleased to note that the student body of this University find it proper to join with the people of Botswana in celebrating 20 years of progress. I know that some Batswana believe that no progress has been made in the last 20 years. I am not surprised by this, because I also know that there are some who might go further to say that the very fact that there is now a University in Botswana, where none existed before, is not an example of progress. I contend that it is an example of achievement.

Government welcomes all our visitors. We hope that as you exchange ideas with us during the next few days, you will contribute to an on-going progress through which meaningful new insights might emerge.

The University is to be commended for organizing an appropriate workshop as we proudly celebrate the Twentieth Anniversary of our independence. I look forward, in the near future, to hearing about your proceedings.

With these few remarks, I am pleased to declare this conference open.

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