

HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN BOTSWANA: A CASE OF POLICY FAILURE OR POOR RESEARCH?

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Abstract

Rising youth unemployment is a major challenge in Botswana. In recognition of the gravity of the matter, the Government of Botswana has formulated and implemented policies addressing unemployment. Despite the well intentioned policies and programmes, unemployment amongst the youth continues to rise. The unemployment rate amongst the youth is higher than the national unemployment rate. This paper attempts to ascertain as to whether the rising unemployment is due to poor formulation and implementation of policies or possibly a failure of research which feed into the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the policies? The paper begins by providing a socio-economic profile of the youth utilizing data from different sources. It goes on to discuss the existing policies and programmes addressing the youth unemployment. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of research informing on policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, highlighting the need to promote a strong relationship between policy makers and researchers in addressing issues of youth unemployment.

Introduction

Botswana just like most developing countries in the world has a youthful population structure. Youth in Botswana is defined as a person aged from 12 to 35 years (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2010). This age group is amongst the most vulnerable populations particularly when it comes to HIV/AIDS, poverty, lack of education and unemployment (Molefe, 2013). The Botswana government acknowledges the fact that these challenges need to be tackled in order for the youth to realize personal growth as well as play a meaningful role in national development. This has been evidenced by the formulation and implementation of the National Youth Policy. Programmes like the Citizens Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) Young Farmers Fund, Youth Development Fund and Kick Start Programme have been established to address the rising youth unemployment.

The overall unemployment rate in Botswana remains quite high although it had been fluctuating between the 2004 and 2009/2010 period. In 2004 the rate was 24.6 percent dropped to 17.5 percent in 2005 and then rose to 26.2 percent in 2008. Between 2009 and 2010 it dropped to 17.8 percent only to rise to 19.9 percent and 20 percent in 2011 and 2013 respectively (Statistics Botswana, 2016). It is young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are more likely than their older counterparts to be unemployed (Statistics Botswana, 2016). The majority of the unemployed are young females. The Botswana Core Welfare Indicators Poverty Survey of 2009/2010 indicated that of the total unemployment rate of 17.8 percent, 35 percent were young people aged between 15 and 29 years old (CSO, 2011). Unemployment amongst the youth is one of the main problems facing the country. The high unemployment rate translates into increasing poverty amongst these age groups (Sekwati, Narayana, and Raboloko, 2012.) This is attributed to the economy failing to create jobs, the youth having no job experience as well as inadequate employment opportunities (CSO 2006). In addition to the economic implications of unemployment it also has socio-political risks associated with it such as social unrest and political instability (Mogomotsi and Madigele, 2017).

Unemployment amongst the youth continues to rise despite the government's well intentioned policies and programmes. Several factors contributing to the rising unemployment have been identified and these include shortages of skills and lack of finance (Siphambe, 2003). However, what has not been ascertained is whether the ineffective policies and programme are due to ineffective implementation or to lack of empirical research. During the period 2004 and 2010 the country experienced fluctuating employments rates. This period coincided with the revision of the National Youth Policy and the introduction of programmes like the Kick Start to address youth unemployment (Diraditsile, 2017). However, it is difficult to ascertain whether the failure of these intervention strategies can be linked to the formulation or implementation processes. Policies are guidelines or plans of action pointing the direction which governments or other related agencies can take in addressing issues and for them to be effective they should be based on research or empirical evidence (Dukeshire. and Thurlow, 2002). Research will provide communities and decision makers with useful recommendations and possible solutions to address issues related to the intervention strategies (Diraditsile, 2017). It is through research that problems preventing the effective implementation of policies and programmes can be identified (Dukeshire and Thurlow, 2002).

This paper discusses government efforts in addressing the rising youth unemployment through the implementation of youth employment policies and programmes. It also tries to ascertain whether the rising youth unemployment despite the government intervention strategies is due to poor formulation and implementation of policies or is it possibly lack of research which would feed into the formulation, implementation and monitoring of these policies. Rising unemployment could be a result of not enough research being fed into the formulation and implementation of policy. The paper also emphasizes the importance of research in policy formulation as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section is the introduction while the second section presents a socio-economic profile of the youth utilizing data from the 2011 Population and Housing Census and other related sources. The third section discusses the different approaches that have been taken in order to address youth unemployment. The paper mainly discusses the National Youth Policy which is the anchor of all the programmes pertaining to youth issues and programmes targeting youth unemployment which fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. The fourth section discusses the importance of research in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring as well as the relationship between policy makers and researchers. The fifth section is the conclusion to the paper.

Socio-economic profile of the youth

It is not easy to define the concept of youth (Mufune, 2001). Age is accepted as one of the significant factor in the definition of youth. According to the National Youth Policy youth in Botswana is defined as a person aged from 12 to 35 years (Republic of Botswana, 2010). The policy though, does recognize the fact that there are some young people who do not fall in this category but might need some support so it does not restrict itself to only those between the specified ages. The real definition of youth should not have fixed age limits. The period between childhood and adulthood is called youth, but what this period covers varies from society to society depending on the diversity of roles, social change, and the complexity of the society in question (Mufune, 2001). This is a phase of life in its own right with experiences that are a product of society's culture that a person goes through. The phase is necessary for personal formation and societal placement and it is at this stage that the youth face particular challenges such as poverty, unemployment and lack of access to education and health (McIlwane and Datta, 2004). The youth require social, economic and political support to realize their full potential.

The size and nature of a youthful population puts pressure on the country's economy in terms of resource distribution as well as the provision of social services like health, housing and education. More importantly a youthful age structure has implications on the provision of employment. The population of Botswana has a relatively young age structure with the majority of the people between the ages of 12-35 years, with 46.5 percent of the total population reported as being between 12 years and 35 years of age. Out of these 50.7 percent were females while 49.3 percent were males (Keetile, 2014). At district level, Central, Kweneng, Gaborone, Southern and Ngamiland had the highest number of youths. More youth resided in urban areas as compared to rural areas, i.e. 69.2 percent of the youths were found in urban areas while 30.8 percent lived in rural areas. With reference to education 62.7 percent had left school, 34.3 percent were still at school and 3 percent had never attended school. Most of those who reported that they were still in school were between 12 years and 19 years. Of those who had been to school 18.3 percent had primary education, 63 percent had secondary education, 8.6 percent held diplomas and 8.6 percent had certificates and 1.1 percent indicated that they had degrees or post graduate training (Keetile, 2014:337). Despite the government's proclamation of universal education for the first ten years of schooling they were a few youths who have never been to school. The number of youths who have never been to school is higher among males than females. The level of education of the youth is important because it is an indication of the quality of the population in terms of their knowledge, skills and expertise. Level of education also determines their level of participation in the labour force.

In 2011 unemployment was higher among those aged 15-19 years at 51.98 percent and the age group 20-24 years at 40.20 percent (Keetile, 2014:337). This could be as a result that most of those in the affected age group were still at school and were not actively seeking for employment. On the other hand the unemployment rate amongst the youth was lower in the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups. Only 24.6 percent amongst those aged 25-29 years and 16.5 percent amongst those aged 30-34 years reported that they were unemployed. Unemployment is highest amongst the female, those who have dropped out of school and

those who have never attended school. It generally follows that the majority of youths who had never attended school or had dropped out were females. Based on the data they were more females unemployed amongst those with secondary education or those with certificates. The same pattern prevailed even when it came to diplomas, degrees or postgraduate training. Differentials were noted between urban and rural areas with rural areas experiencing high levels of unemployment in comparison to urban areas. In terms of occupational status only 1 percent amongst them held managerial and administrative jobs. They were even a fewer number of youths engaged in skilled agricultural works. The most common jobs occupied by the youths included service works, shop and markets sales works; elementary occupations; craft and related works (Keetile, 2014).

Policies and programmes

The Botswana government recognizes the important role that youth play in the development of the country. This is evidenced by the creation of a youth department under the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture whose mandate is to address issues affecting the youth. It is imperative for the youth to realize their potential so that they can participate effectively in the development process. The Department of Youth in close cooperation with the Botswana National Youth Council has been mandated to oversee the implementation of the National Youth Policy and National Action Plan for Youth (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2010). The policy was formulated after broad consultation with all the stakeholders including both in government and non-governmental organizations. The implementation of the policy is spearheaded by the Botswana National Youth Council which provides the framework within which the youth can be mobilized to participate in national development.

According to the National Youth Policy young people in the country have a number of fundamental rights (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2010). These include, the right to good parental care, protection from any form of exploitation, discrimination and abuse representation by young people in decision making bodies affecting youth affairs access to all benefits of citizenship such as education, training, employment, legal services, health care, recreation, etc. The National Youth Policy, whilst promoting the rights of young people, also encourages them to understand and fulfill their obligations. Young people should be actively involved in the decision making process at all levels of their lives. What should be noted is that the National Youth Policy was not been formulated in a vacuum as one of its key strategies is to promote the harmonization of laws and policies that are oriented toward young people. There are certain laws and programmes in existence which are not in line with the policy and do impact on its effectiveness. Other key areas of emphasis include education and health (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2010). In the area of education, the policy aims to promote the need for cooperation between the different stakeholders and also strengthen the link between education and employment. The link will result in education becoming more relevant to the economy and thereby creating more employment for the young people. In order to effectively implement the policy, the Botswana Youth Council has developed a strategic plan in which key areas of attention have been outlined. This includes the right to decent work and favourable conditions (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2010).

In line with the strategic area of creating youth employment, programmes to enhance youth participation and empowerment have been put in place. These include the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA), Young Farmers Fund, Youth Development Fund and Kick Start Programme. The CEDA Young Farmer Fund (CYFF) was launched in 2007 to enable young Botswana citizens between the ages of 18 and 40 years to have access to training and funding so as to engage in sustainable agricultural activities. The fund in the long run was going to create sustainable employment, foster youth enterprises and minimize rural-urban migration among young people. The CEDA administered the fund and also provided monitoring and mentoring services. The maximum amount of loan for project funding which one could apply for was P500 000. Since its inception CEDA had received 420 applications and approved 163 projects country wide creating about 357 jobs, excluding casual labourers (Mmegi

Online, 2008). The only serious challenges that the fund had encountered so far was the outbreak of veldt fires and the foot-and-mouth disease. On the other hand, though the young people displayed commitment, they were inexperienced and did not possess the required agricultural skills. Despite these challenges no projects falling under the fund were reported as abandoned and some of the clients had already started repaying their loans. The scheme proved to be popular with young people in the rural areas, while urban areas like Gaborone were still lagging behind. This could be attributed the fact that there was scarcity of land in the capital city, especially for agriculture. Despite the seemingly successful running of the project, in March, 2015 Parliament stopped the Young farmers Fund to be replaced with a more comprehensive scheme which would include businesses other than agriculture (Baaitse, 2015).

Another programme established to address youth unemployment is the Youth Development Fund (YDF) which was set up with the aim of equipping young Batswana aged between 18 and 29 years with skills and funds to enable them to own businesses through which they would generate sustainable employment opportunities for young people (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2009). This fund is open to out of school youth, unemployed and underemployed i.e. working youth who earn less than P600.00 monthly. However, there is lack of entrepreneurial skills among the beneficiaries resulting in “high project failure, high loan default rates and high demand for funding by the youth” (Mmegi Online, 2012). It was felt that it was necessary to revise the fund taking on board these challenges and mapping the way forward. Based on the identified challenges new proposals were presented and these included suggestion that the beneficiaries be adequately prepared to deal with the entitlement mentality that some of them displayed.

The Kick Start Programme launched in 2004, is another programme launched targeting youth unemployment. It is different from Young farmers Fund and the Young Development Fund in that it is financed by a private institution. It is run by the Kgalagadi Beverages Trust (KBT), the social investment arm of Kgalagadi Breweries (Pty) Ltd (Malibala, 2013). However, like the other two funds it provides business skills training, mentorship and assistance during the implementation of the business idea to citizen youths from the ages of 18 years to 35 years. It also provides 100 percent grants ranging from P10 000 to P250 000 and is open to all types of businesses aiming at creating a culture of entrepreneurship among young people by promoting business awareness (Malibala, 2014). By 2014 the programme had trained over 140 young entrepreneurs, enabling more than 35 small businesses to be set up across various sectors of the economy (Malibala, 2014). Despite successfully setting up youth run businesses in different sectors some of the businesses face the challenge of not being able to run successful businesses due to lack of business management skills after obtaining the funds.

Policy formulation and research

As discussed in the previous sections the government has implemented policies like the National Youth Policy as well as different programmes in attempt to address challenges the youth face. Creating sustainable employment for the youth is one of the key strategic areas of the policy. The policy goes even further to provide the framework through which this can be made possible. Several programmes have been launched to tackle this issue. Despite all the efforts made in addressing youth unemployment the rate is quite alarmingly high. When assessing the various programmes directed towards youth unemployment different challenges facing them have been identified. Most of the challenges attributed to poor performance of the project have been identified in various studies (Mogomotsi and Madigele, 2017; Siphambe, 2003). These include factors such as shortages of skills, a wrong attitude towards work (which contributes to low productivity), and lack of finance contributed to unemployment (Siphambe, 2003). Absence of social policy research and lack of monitoring and evaluation frameworks were also identified as some of the challenges contributing to the rising youth unemployment (Diraditsile, 2017). These are not new challenges and apply to most government programmes and not only the ones targeting the youth unemployment. For example, Ipelegeng, a poverty eradication programmes has been criticized for creating a ‘dependency syndrome’ amongst the intended beneficiaries (Bakwena, 2012). Programmes like these do not equip the beneficiaries

with the relevant training or skills to reduce unemployment. However, there hasn't been any evaluation to determine whether it is achieving its intended objective of reducing unemployment and/or alleviating poverty. Most of the programmes after implementation are not evaluated to assess whether the objectives have been met (Bakwena, 2012). Despite the fact that previous research had revealed that they were very few youths with agricultural skills the government went ahead and created the Young Farmers Fund. The issue of shortage of agricultural skills among the youth should have been taken into account when launching the programme.

There are many factors such as political, economic and social that may affect the policy making process (Koehlmoos, Rashid, Rahman, Cravioto and Hanney 2009). The process involves how policies are made, who is making them and who are they intended for. Research can play a key role in the formulation and implementation of policies. Research is necessary to understand and define key issues in policy making as well as the beneficiaries it is intended for (Dukeshire and Thurlow, 20002). Research is important in the formulation of policy and that is why most of the programmes and policies have an evaluation and monitoring component. The Botswana Government also does acknowledge the importance of research in policy making as there are a number of institutions mandated to collect and analyse data in the country like Statistics Botswana and the Botswana Institute of Development Policy Analysis. The importance of research is also acknowledged in the National Youth Policy as it is stated that “a research, data analysis and monitoring component will be developed to improve understanding of youth constraints and policy performance” (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2010:50). The Department of Youth has a research division whose main focus is to carry out research on youth related issues for the department. The unit is also responsible for evaluation and monitoring of policies and programmes which fall under the department's jurisdiction. In order to carry out this mandate effectively the division collaborates with other research institutions. The division also makes sure that youth related matters are included in national surveys and censuses. Under the department of youth there is also a policy unit which is responsible for the monitoring and reviewing of policy pertaining to the youth. It also handles the publicity surrounding youth affairs.

The importance of collaborative research is also emphasized in the National Youth Policy. The policy specifies that the research will be conducted in conjunction with the body responsible for compiling national statistics in this case Statistics Botswana. Through this collaboration socio-economic data and demographic indicators on the youth will be compiled and analyzed on a regular basis. The aim of collecting and analyzing this data is to assist with the policy implementation process as well as keeping the beneficiaries, interested parties and the public informed about the activities being executed (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2010). In addition to providing funding for projects and programmes addressing youth unemployment like the Young Farmers Fund, Youth Development Fund and Kick Start Program, they also have monitoring and evaluation components as part of the services that they offer. It is through research that policy makers are able to recognize the challenges that the programmes are faced with. Research will enable them to identify and understand the key issues surrounding these problems. In doing so the policy makers will be in a position to come up with a plan of action as well as put in place measures for evaluating monitoring progress (Dukeshire and Thurlow, 20002). However, there is limited information on the on the research, data analysis and monitoring exercises carried out under the National Youth Policy with reference to these different programmes.

As already alluded to, effective formulation and implementation of policies and programmes should be based on empirical research. According to Jones (2011) reliable sources of information are necessary for policy makers in Africa in order to take action. This is not only unique to African decision makers but it applies the world over. What should be borne in mind is that it is not any type of research. Most research though generating impressive data do not address policy matters. Research has to be strategic and policy orientated in order to address development matters (Bank 2010). Research pertaining to policy has to be evidence based, that is, taking into account prevailing public opinion, organizational culture, incompatible

time frames in policy making and research, values and ideology of both researchers and policy makers (Milani, 2009). Research is not always designed to be relevant to policy and at times policy-makers do not see research findings as central to their decision-making (Stone, Maxwell and Keating, 2001). The relevance of research in policy making is not always clear cut. The research itself may not be timely and even when it is, the researcher might fail to communicate the findings to the policy actors. The onus is on the researcher to present and interpret the findings of a research study. The results cannot speak for themselves. Researchers should be in a position to explain why existing practice should change and in what ways and of course taking into consideration the impact of the research findings on the implementation costs.

The existence of reliable data does not guarantee that it will be utilized in policy making or implementation. Policy makers may decide not to use research results when formulating or even monitoring policies. They usually treat information from researchers with suspicion (Diraditsile, 2017). The non-utilization of research data can also be due to lack of resources to incorporate in implementing the suggested policies systematically. Some policy actors might be of the view that research might slow down the policy formulation and monitoring process (Koehlmoos, Rahman, Cravioto, and Hanney, 2009). At the same time it could just be a case of the policy actor not appreciating the use of research data in their work. However, not all blame should be put on the door step of the policy actors, researchers themselves may not understand their role in the policy making process. Research data may not always be coherently presented and therefore not making it easy to understand or access. This implies that researchers and policy makers should work in close co-operation

Although research is important in the policy making process issues to do with monitoring and evaluation are usually overlooked. Many government policies do not put in place monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The idea of creating a direct link between research and policy is not as clear cut as one would expect it to be (Dukeshire and Thurlow, 2002). Many researchers feel quite strongly that research should not be limited to or directed by the demands of society, but that more is accomplished when research is unfettered and free to follow its own discourse. All too often, research projects do not result in policy change, because they do not take into account the complex realities of a country or a sector and fail to involve the main stakeholders in the research process. Yet, better utilization of research and evidence in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life (Dukeshire and Thurlow, 2002). In Africa, a wide gap exists between the producers and consumers of knowledge, and research could have a greater impact on development policy than it has had to date. It is important that there is a dialogue between the researchers and policymakers. This dialogue will enable the policymakers to articulate the type of information needed when formulating, implementing and evaluating policies. In turn the researchers will be in a position to conduct research which is timely and evidence based with findings made accessible to policymakers. In Botswana, many policies do not have a monitoring and evaluation framework in place and even those that do it is rarely implemented (Diraditsile, 2017). A case in point is the Youth Development Fund in which a monitoring and evaluation framework was included but it was not utilized after the programme was launched.

Beneficiaries participation in policy making is just as important as the relationship between the researcher and the policy maker but the. According to Giddens, 'practical policies which are not based on informed awareness of the ways of life of those they affect have little chances of success' (1993:22). For a policy or a programme to be successful, it is important for the intended beneficiaries to get involved in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of these policies. In as much as the intended beneficiaries should get involved in the policy process they should also participate in the research process. They should take part in identifying solutions to the problems that are affecting them and then recommend appropriate actions (Lesetedi and Mulinge, 2001). This makes it imperative for the policy makers and the researchers not only to work together but to also collaborate with the beneficiaries. The involvement of the beneficiaries in the policy and research process should also take into account other factors like administrative capacity,

time pressures and limited finances which are vital in the effective implementation of a policy. Lucas (2013) pointed out that policy initiatives are implemented in a top to down approach and beneficiaries are totally excluded from the policy formulation and implementation process and yet they are expected to apply them

Conclusion

There is no doubt that tailored policies and programmes are important in addressing challenges faced by the youth. However, for them to be effective there is need for empirical research to guide the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the policies and programmes. It is difficult to ascertain what role research has played in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the existing Botswana's National Youth Policy and the related programmes. It is also not clear whether the rising youth unemployment, is a result of failure of the actual policy formulation and implementation. The interconnection between research and policy should be seriously looked into especially in the successful formulation and implementation of policies and programmes. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks are very important in assessing these programmes. Although some of the programmes have in-built mechanisms these are not fully utilized. What should also be considered in the success of programmes is the inclusion of the intended beneficiaries in policy formulation and implementation.

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