




BOTSWANA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2022

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

The government of Botswana’s initial response to the crisis included a short-term economic and humanitarian relief package in the months of April to May in 2020. State of emergency regulations barred industrial action for 18 months and placed a moratorium on retrenchments; employment adjustments and cuts still occurred during this period. In October 2020, Botswana’s Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan (ERTP) was approved by Parliament. It encompasses a range of measures for a more sustainable and diverse economy following the Covid-19 pandemic. The ERTP extends wage protection in sectors particularly affected by the crisis, as well as support to enterprises and employers, including tax breaks and guaranteed loans.

Trade unions call on the government of Botswana to further protect jobs and income through the implementation of an employment insurance fund as part of national employment policies. National health insurance should be established to increase medical aid coverage, in dialogue with social partners. Trade unions ask for a human-centred approach to be prioritised in line with the ILO Centenary Declaration. The crisis has also underscored the need for statutory entitlements during termination, which should be treated differently from conflictual disputes in the courts.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

Botswana’s National Development Plan (NDP 11), and Vision 2036 for sustainable economic development are aligned to the SDGs. All 17 SDGs have been adopted, and targets are being monitored through domestic indicator frameworks. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MFED) is responsible for SDG implementation.

Overall, more resources are required for SDG implementation, including to meet the data requirements. Trade unions would welcome a more structured approach to consultation across all ministries responsible

for policies and programmes linked to SDG implementation. The MFED holds information sessions but does not involve trade unions as social partners. Dialogue with social partners is restricted to the Decent Work Country Programme, led by the Ministry of Employment, Labour Productivity and Skills Development. The recovery plan (ERTP) and National Employment Policy, recently adopted by Parliament, are two recent examples where trade unions submitted workers’ input and suggestions but were not fully consulted during policy development.

TRANSPARENCY



Regular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Information sessions but no interaction

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners contribute individually to government’s SDG national plan



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

With regard to **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty)**, the proportion of the population of Botswana living below the international poverty line has been halved since the 1990s, standing at 16 per cent in 2015, but this calculation includes in-kind wages, gifts, school meals and other forms of government aid. Without government aid, the incidence of poverty would stand close to 24 per cent. Unemployment, increasing income inequality, and the rates of working poor remain serious problems. Botswana ranks 100th in the UN HD Index, showing room for improvement. Although all Botswanans are entitled to a pension, the current social security system is fragmented and the percentage of the population covered by at least one social protection instrument stands at 14.7 per cent, leaving much room for progress in order to achieve **target 1.3 (nationally appropriate social protection systems)**.

Botswana has made progress in certain areas related to **gender equality (SDG 5)**, including women's equal access to education, with 89.6 per cent of women having at least some secondary education. However, women remain overrepresented in low-wage jobs. Progress towards achieving **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)** is hampered by lack of data and the fact that the government does not recognise the value of unpaid care and domestic work, which is still characterised by a high incidence of informal arrangements and no social protection policies. The Decent Work Country Programme has initiatives targeted towards improving women's empowerment and equality, and women have recently been appointed to several high-profile positions, but much remains to be done to achieve **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership)**.

Many challenges persist for the achievement of the targets related to **SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)** in Botswana. With informal employment at 66.5 per cent in 2020 and vulnerable employment at 25.9 per cent in 2019, the country is far off achieving **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of MSMEs)**. The adoption of the second-generation Decent Work Country Programme 2020-2024 and

the adoption of the First National Employment Policy of Botswana constitute positive steps towards achieving **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**, but the unemployment rate stood at 24.9 per cent in 2020, severely affecting the youth (with a soaring 46.2 per cent of those under 25 unemployed). Trade unions consider these figures to be conservative, as they do not account for discouraged job seekers or those in public works and drought relief programmes. Women earn less in high-paying jobs than men, particularly in the private sector. NEET (not in employment, education or training) indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at 39.3 per cent in 2020. Botswana has ratified international conventions on freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining, in line with **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments)**. However, domestic implementation is insufficient, with too few trained labour inspectors, employers in the private sector continuing to flout laws, and government attempts to curb the right to strike. Organising is more difficult in the informal and private sectors, as employment is more precarious.

Indicators for **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection, to achieve greater equality)** show a bleak picture. Botswana's labour share of GDP was 46.2 per cent in 2017. Due to wage inequalities, a large proportion of this wealth goes to too few people. In 2019, the top 10 per cent of income earners held 59.3 per cent share of GDP, while the bottom 50 per cent of income earners were holding 8.1 per cent. Sluggish wage growth has forced workers to take on higher levels of debt, making them more susceptible to exploitation by employers.

Adverse effects of climate change observed in Botswana include drought, extremely high temperatures, frequent heat waves, and heavy rainfall. To attain **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies)**, Botswana's Climate Change Policy of 2021 was adopted by Parliament. The government has stated it remains committed to reducing national carbon emissions to 15% by 2030, but there has been no engagement with trade unions on just transition to mitigate climate change.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions urge the Botswana government to take the following measures:

- establish a national social dialogue structure that promotes full inclusion of the social partners;
- put in place a comprehensive national social security policy which is integrated, inclusive, and participatory, administered by a single government department;
- establish a living wage (P4000) to ensure workers are able to meet basic human needs and to cover transport, food and housing expenses;
- empower local authorities to build affordable low- and medium-cost, multi-residential, and high-density housing for citizens; accelerate land servicing and allocation to allow citizens to build their own houses;
- improve and expand technical and vocational education, linked to industrial policy. Extend the Human Resource Development Fund for employees affected by technological changes in the workplace;
- review the national youth strategy;
- improve primary health care by building health consciousness in children and young people;
- create an independent Environment Protection Agency;
- make the Industrial Court a court of first instance in labour disputes and establish an Industrial Court of Appeal with combined jurisdiction. Create an independent Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration Authority separate from the Department of Labour; and
- establish an Independent Police Complaints Authority to deal with complaints of police misconduct or dereliction of duty.

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