

The State of Gender Information in Botswana

SHADRACK B. RATHAPO
University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

This paper addresses the status of gender information in Botswana to reveal gaps and identify how these can be addressed. It gives background information on Botswana, assesses the status of women in Botswana and reveals that a lot still has to be done in improving the lives of women. It discusses mechanisms – both governmental and non-governmental – put in place to fight for the cause of women.

It shows how these mechanisms generate gender information through research activities. It enumerates the problems encountered in providing access to gender information in Botswana and concludes with proposals for enhancing accessibility of gender information. Gender information networking is seen as the answer to most of the problems of providing access to gender information in Botswana.

Basic facts about Botswana

Location	Southern Africa
Surface area	582, 000 km ²
GDP per Capita	9,807 pula
Adult literacy (total)	68.9% (1993)
Male literacy	66.9% (1993)
Female literacy	70.3% (1993)
Population	1.5 million
Males	48.1%
Females	51.9%
Average household size	4.7 persons (1991)
Population Density	2.6 persons/km ²

(Source: National Development Plan 8)

Botswana gained independence on 30 September 1966 after 80 years as a British Protectorate. The constitution established a non-racial democracy which maintains freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of association and affords all citizens equal rights. The thirty-one years since independence have seen a remarkable economic

transformation. Government revenues have been greatly strengthened by inflow of aid funds, negotiations of mining agreements that ensure Botswana a fair return from mineral projects especially diamonds, which constitutes about 80% of exports and contributes 33% to the GDP. Access to water, health and education have been greatly improved. The provision of a broad range of services has raised living standards for the whole population. In real terms Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has averaged around 13% per annum over the entire independence period.

Botswana is a member of various international organisations including the United Nations, Non-Aligned movement, Organisation of African Unity (OAU), African, Caribbean and Pacific group countries, Lome Convention, Commonwealth, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), African Development Bank, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The status of women in Botswana

At a seminar entitled “Women and the law in Botswana” held in 1987, four women activists presented a picture of the status of women in

Shadrack B. Rathapo is librarian at the University of Botswana, Private Bag 00390, Gaborone, Botswana. E-mail: RATHAPOS@mopipi.ub.bw.

Botswana. Athalia Molokomme, a law lecturer at the University of Botswana gave a summary of women's legal status under Botswana family law. She revealed that family law subordinates married women to their husbands and leaves important decisions about property, and children, to the husband; single women face problems of maintenance for themselves and their children. Vickey F. Masenya, a banker and women's world banking promoter, indicated that married women because of community property laws are required to seek assistance from their husbands when applying for loans. The property acquired by these women will be registered in the husband's name. Unity Dow, a private legal practitioner now a High Court Judge showed how rape victims (women) "suffer" due to the intimidating nature of the courts, and how unsatisfactory was the courts' sentencing policy in rape and defilement cases. Alice Mogwe, a lawyer, showed how widespread the issue of wife battering is and that it occurs for women in all classes of society. Sexual harassment at work, in society in general and rape were also said to be rife.

Even though some discriminatory laws have been repealed and some positive steps taken towards gender mainstreaming, the position of women in Botswana is generally still as was portrayed in 1987, as indicated in the National Policy of Women in Development.

1. Existing laws and cultural attitudes limit women's effective participation in economic activities, public and private life. The government performed (in 1998) a review of laws affecting the status of women (at least 25).
2. Reproductive health: maternal mortality rate 200-300 per 10,000 live births (1991).
3. Statistics on post-secondary education especially vocational and technical schools show a smaller proportion of women and this has a bearing on women's access to job opportunities.
4. Indicators of economic activity and employment portray a huge gender gap.
5. Studies on poverty have shown a tendency towards feminisation of the problem especially female-headed households who represent 47% of the households.
6. Participation of women in political and decision-making positions is still low.
7. Violence against women is another problem faced by Botswana women.

8. The Girl-child appears to be confronted by more socio-cultural obstacles than her male counterpart.

This status of women in Botswana has triggered a number of mechanisms committed to the improvement of the status quo. The government has put in place institutional frameworks to deal with problems faced by women. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have emerged to fight injustices against women and to advance the status of women. All these mechanisms have led to activism and research on gender issues and ultimately to the need for and generation of information on the subject.

The generation of gender information

Women's Affairs Department

Women's Affairs was established in 1981 as a unit in recognition of the importance of the contributions by women's organisations and non-formal groups to national development. It was upgraded into a department in 1996.

Its main functions are:

- to co-ordinate all women's activities at the local and national level
- to disseminate information to women on all aspects of development
- to increase women's knowledge and level of awareness and
- to ensure that government, non-government and private organisations incorporate gender aspects as far as possible in information they generate and disseminate.

Recognising the disadvantaged position the women of Botswana are in, the government of Botswana, through this department in its National Development Plan 7 (1991-1997) conducted more research into women's issues and developed a documentation centre/library and involved the women in development policy.

These activities resulted in generation of a lot of information on women and gender issues in Botswana. The department also documents and disseminates information through its library; the media; community gathering centres and council meetings. The department's library has a modest collection of both published and unpublished literature and is developing a computerised database using micro CDS/ISIS.

National Reference Library

The National Reference Library is a legal deposit Library and has a little literature on gender issues. Access to this by the public is provided even though borrowing rights are not extended to the public.

The National Archives and Records Services

The National Archives and Records Services is also a legal deposit centre and operates like the National Reference library.

Activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Women's NGOs have emerged to address the plight of women in Botswana. The Young Women's Christian Association was formed in 1965 and operates five day-care centres primarily for young women, a hostel for women and a commercial training centre. Emang Basadi Women's Association was started in 1986 to address the issues related to the status of women in society and its activities are about the social, economic, political and legal status of women. Metlhaetsile Women's Information Centre was established in 1991 and its main aim is to empower local women through education and counselling to build better lives, and to take part in and benefit more fully from the development process in Botswana. Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) is a regional activist organisation in Southern Africa established in Botswana in 1989. Its main aim is to mobilise women and lobby for legal reform. Women's Finance House Botswana was established in 1989 with the aim of assisting poor women entrepreneurs, particularly those who have not had access to the services of local financial institutions to participate in the economic mainstream through training, providing access to training and facilitating their legal status. Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) is an Africa NGO whose aim is to promote local and regional strategies that link law with development to improve women's status in Africa. The Botswana chapter of (WILDAF) was established in 1994 and its main programmes are legal education workshops, training of trainers for NGOs and grassroots groups concerned about raising

legal awareness among women in particular, and research on women's legal rights abuses. Among these NGOs Metlhaetsile has a collection on legal issues affecting women and has a computerised database. Emang Basadi has a collection focusing on various women's issues and are in the process of computerising their database. None of these NGOs have a professionally qualified person managing their collections.

The Women's NGO Coalition

The Women's NGO Coalition was established in 1993, bringing together all women NGOs mentioned above, to co-ordinate NGO preparations for and after the Beijing Conference.

Since its inception the coalition has implemented various activities to achieve its stated goals and objectives. These have included the promotion of dialogue and co-operation between women's organisations, collaboration with government through the Women's Affairs Department, the Parliamentary briefing on women's issues, sub-regional post Beijing workshop processes, production of a quarterly newsletter, co-drafting of the National Plan of Action for the Beijing Platform for Action, contribution to National Development Plan (NDP 8), preparation of a submission to the Law Reform Committee and Coordination of the Commemoration of various events relevant to the women's movement. All these activities have led to the generation of large volumes of information on women and gender issues. However, the coalition does not have an organised centre for managing the information nor does it have a qualified information professional

The University of Botswana

As the study of women and gender issues has been pursued at an international level, the University of Botswana has since the late 1980s built up a record of activity in the field of gender studies and an institutional commitment to gender awareness in its own policies. A wide range of research and teaching initiatives has been undertaken by individuals.

The University has developed a number of organisational structures including the gender and education committee, the Gender Research

Network and in 1991 the Gender Policy and Programme Committee (GPPC) and consequently the University came up with a gender policy objective. In 1995, GPPC in conjunction with the Centre for Continuing Education organised for the first time the regional short course on Gender and Development. Participants are normally drawn from the Southern African region and would be women and men who are working in one of the following contexts:

- a. As researchers, academics or trainers
- b. As planners or policy makers
- c. As NGO programme officers or project co-ordinators

The course is six weeks in duration and is held during the University long vacation. The University of Botswana has graduate courses and various other social sciences departments incorporate gender in their courses e.g. law, sociology.

University of Botswana Library

In order to provide the necessary support for improved teaching and research in the area of gender, library resources have been built, in the form of audiovisuals, grey literature and books. It is also a legal deposit centre and the gender grey literature is available in the Botswana and special collection unit. The gender librarian is a member of all University Gender Committees and so is able to know in advance of new courses and in a position to build a collection to support them. DDC is used for classification and library of Congress for subject headings.

The National Institute of Development Research and Documentation (NIR)

The University of Botswana established the National Institute of Development Research and Documentation NIR within its framework in 1975 initially as a documentation centre of the University. It was mandated to be the national focal point for the organisation of the socio-economic development literature produced in Botswana consisting mainly of grey literature. Shortly thereafter, NIR grew into a research institute. The objectives of NIR as set out in the University of Botswana Statutes of 1982 are as follows:

- to promote, co-ordinate, and conduct research on issues of socio-economic, environmental, and cultural development affecting Botswana;
- to develop the national research capacity within Botswana; and
- to document, publish, and disseminate the results of such research

Research at NIR is carried out by the staff of the Institute and other researchers in various areas of women and gender. Other areas of research at NIR include agriculture and rural development, education, environmental studies, health and nutrition, information technology, and library and documentation.

The Institute runs the Documentation Unit specialising in the collection of grey literature on the development of Botswana, Southern Africa and Africa in this order of priority.

(i) Generation of Gender Information

In 1993 the Institute launched a Gender Research initiative for promoting, co-ordinating and undertaking gender studies and research at the University and in the country at large. These activities are aimed at creating awareness of the importance of gender issues in development, teaching and research.

The Gender Research programme initiated and administered a Gender Research Awards Scheme aimed at enhancing local gender research and broadening the knowledge base and understanding of issues affecting women and men in society, national development planning and public policy formulation. So through this programme NIR generates information on gender issues.

(ii) Collecting Women and Gender Issues Grey Literature

The Documentation centre of NIR supports the gender research programme, the academic community of the University of Botswana, scholars both within and outside Botswana and women non-governmental organisations and women activists by providing information services among others on women and gender issues. The information collected by the documentation centre is generated by women NGOs, researchers on women and gender issues, lecturers of the University of Botswana, students, NIR researchers, consultants, international organisations and UN agencies. The centre holds the largest collection of gender grey literature on Botswana and Southern Africa.

(iii) Types of Materials Collected

The women and gender issues collection comprises of the following types of grey literature:

Conference, Workshop and Seminar Papers; research reports/notes; gender research network reports; government publications; journal articles; theses/dissertations; and newspaper clippings.

(iv) Services provided to clients

Selective dissemination of information, Literature searches; photocopying service; current affairs; reference services; current awareness services; user referral service.

(v) Publicising Women and Gender Issues Grey Literature

The efforts of collecting, organising and storing the information on women and gender issues will be fruitless if the intended consumers of this information; researchers, students, women NGOs and women in general, are not made aware of its existence. So the collection is publicised through the following ways: women and gender issues bibliography, accessions lists; brochures; and displays.

It is quite clear that the University of Botswana is committed to gender mainstreaming in Botswana and without any doubt reflects that it is one of the major key players especially in as far as gender training and information generation, documentation and dissemination is concerned.

Problems encountered in providing access to gender information in Botswana

1. Gender information in Botswana is *difficult to collect* because it is mainly in the form of grey literature. It is often not recorded in standard Bibliography sources e.g. Botswana National Bibliography (NABOB). It also never finds its way into the mainstream publishing and distribution channels.
2. None of the women NGOs have *well-organised collections* nor qualified information professionals and this makes access to the information they have very difficult.
3. *The legal deposit law* is not effectively enforced and as such most researchers do not deposit their research results and this result in loss of valuable literature.
4. *Lack of a formal Gender Information Network.* The University of Botswana maintains an informal network of organisations and individuals engaged in gender activities, for the purpose of enhancing collection of gender information. However, since it is informal it is not very effective.

Gender information networking

Realising that there is a massive output of publications and information on women and gender issues in Botswana as a result of the extensive research activity, and that there is no co-ordination in the collection and dissemination of the literature, the University of Botswana organised a national workshop for sharing information on women and gender issues in Botswana in April

1998. At the workshop issues of information collection, access, preservation and networking were tackled. The main goal of the workshop was to develop a communication mechanism with all institutions which generate, document, and disseminate information on women and gender issues in Botswana, that will facilitate easy transfer and sharing of information.

Objectives of the workshop were to:

- bring together all organisations involved in the generation, collection and dissemination of information on women and gender issues
- establish ways of sharing current as well as published research and other publications
- develop ways of co-operating in the collection and dissemination of information
- establish a formal network of organisations working in the area of women and gender information for purposes of collecting, documenting and preservation of each information for current usage, as well as for posterity.

Outcomes of the workshop were a call for:

- formal establishment of an information sharing network of generators, collectors and disseminators of women and gender information
- establishment of a database and/or electronic link of all organisations working with women and gender information
- creation of a national database of women's information.

Concerning the first possible outcome, Botswana was already in a privileged position of having several networks of women's organisations; the Women's NGO Coalition, the Gender Research Network and an active Women's Affairs Department in the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. Although no previous attempt has been made at networking information resources a loose informal network based on personal contact has existed. One of the recommendations of the workshop was therefore a call for the formal establishment of a network of individuals and organisations working in the area of women and gender issues. This initiative sought to establish formal networking mechanisms among generators, users and disseminators of information on women and gender issues in the light of growing activism and scholarship on women. The focus of this network would be to facilitate information

resources exchange in this era of increased production of literature, research and education on women and gender, some of which originates outside the boundaries of the existing networks. A steering committee for the establishment of the network was therefore established and the network known as Botswana Gender Information Network (BOGINET) has been formally established.

The network is now working on the following functions:

- establishing a database on gender information
- facilitating exchange of gender information among network members
- facilitating sharing of resources
- encouraging and facilitating e-mail connectivity among member organisations
- facilitating mounting of training workshops on the use of Information and Telecommunications Technology (ICT) by women
- increasing visibility of gender information
- increasing gender awareness through the whole nation

To add to these efforts, BOGINET has created a link with the Gender in Africa Information Network (GAIN) based at the African Gender Institute, University of Capetown. BOGINET is also in the process of creating a discussion list and a World Wide Web site. More information about GAIN and the African Gender Institute is available on their Web sites: African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town (AGI) <http://www.uct.ac.za/org/agi/> and the Gender in Africa Information Network (GAIN) <http://www.uct.ac.za/org/agi/gain/gindex.htm>

References

Aina, L.O. 1992. Access to development literature on Botswana. *Information Development* 8(2): 104–108.

A Directory of non-governmental organisations in Botswana Gaborone: Norwegian Agency international development. 1995, pp. 150–170.

Hogeweg-de Haart, H.P. 1985. Grey literature in Social Science, A Concise Review of Literature. In: *Grey Literature in Social Science Information and Documentation* Budapest; Economic Information Unit, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, pp. 9–45.

Women NGO Coalition newsletter. 1996. Vols. 6 & 7 (June and September): 1.

Women NGO Coalition newsletter 1996–97. Vols. 8 & 9.

Kufa, J.C. 1993. Grey literature in academic libraries in developing countries. In: *Problems and Prospects. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Grey Literature held at RAI Congress Centre, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 13–15 December*: pp. 403–13.

Kwafo-Akoto, K. 1995. Collecting, publicizing and providing access to socio-economic grey literature in Southern Africa with particular reference to Botswana. *Interlending and Document Supply* 23(2): 10–16.

Kwafo-Akoto, K. and K.H. Moahi. 1993. Grey Literature and the DEVSIS – Botswana Project: the Case of the National Institute of Research and Documentation. In: *Proceedings of the first International Conference on Grey Literature held at the RAI Congress Centre, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 13–15 December*: pp. 205–14.

Monageng, S.B. 1991. DEVSIS – Botswana: Report of a Seminar held in Gaborone, Botswana 4–5 June. Gaborone: NIR, pp. 9 – 14, pp. 49–53.

National Development Plan 7 (1991–1997) Gaborone: Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1991, pp. 1 – 20; pp. 385–403.

National Institute of Development Research and Documentation. 1996. Gaborone: NIR, pp. 1–11.

Raseroka, H.K. 1986. Relevant Library Services in Developing Countries. *IFLA Journal*. 12(4): 288–91.

Women's affairs division. 1995. Policy on Women in Development. Gaborone: Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, pp. 3–20.

Wood, D.N. 1984. The Collection, bibliographic Control and Accessibility of Grey Literature *IFLA Journal* 10(3): 278–82.