

STATEMENT BY

HONOURABLE ASSISTANT MINISTER OF FINANCE AND
DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (BOTSWANA)

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AT THE HAGUE FORUM FOR THE REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF
THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT(ICPD)'94

THE HAGUE, 8 -12 FEBRUARY, 1999

Mr President

1. It is my pleasure to present to this gathering the situation analysis of my country Botswana, since the International Conference on Population and Development meeting held in Cairo in 1994.
2. Since Independence in 1966, Botswana's development efforts to raise the standard of living of her people has been guided by the planning objectives of sustained development, rapid economic growth, economic independence and social justice.
3. In the process, Government has recognised the linkages between population growth and our objectives of poverty reduction, human resource development and environmental conservation.
4. During the period 1977 to 1987 Government invested heavily in economic and social infrastructure. As a result, per capita income has been rising in real terms overtime.
5. Although the economy is still showing signs of growth, there is need to identify alternative engines of growth and to manage the rate of growth of the population to achieve sustained development.
6. Botswana has a small and youthful but rapidly growing population which has more than doubled in size between 1971 and 1991. High annual population growth rates of 4.9% and 3.5% for the 1971 - 1981 and 1981 - 1991 periods have been recorded. About 44 percent of the population is under 15 years of age. The total fertility rate of 5.0 in 1988 has declined to 4.2 in 1991 and was estimated at 4.03 in 1996 according to the 1996 Botswana Family Health Survey. The contraceptive prevalence rate has risen from 32% to 41.7% during the same period. Further improvements in this direction are expected as a result of the current level and intensity of our intervention measures being put in place.
8. Owing to increased social equity and access to health services there has been a significant drop in "death rates". However, mortality rates in the coming years are likely to rise due to the impact of AIDS epidemic; a situation reflecting the observed drop in life expectancy at birth from 66 years in 1996 to 52 years in 1998.

9. In spite of the improvements made in lowering the under-five mortality, raising life expectancy, increasing contraceptive prevalence and adult literacy rates, issues of high teenage pregnancies, maternal morbidity and mortality, the spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic, the emergence of female-headed households and associated poverty are of concern. All these issues coupled with the impact of past high population growth rates have implications for the future development and standard of living of our people.
10. A 1996 survey indicates about 17 percent of the population is infected with HIV/AIDS virus, of which the youth accounted for slightly over 40% of the reported cases. Despite the increasing death toll and the likely socio-economic impact induced by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, population growth rate is expected to remain high. Meanwhile, Government is currently undertaking socio-economic impact studies of HIV/AIDS on the Botswana economy and society. The findings are expected to play an important role in guiding the national response to the epidemic. The studies are expected to be completed in August 1999.

Mr President,

11. Education plays an important role in the development and quality of human resources. High demand for education services, resulting primarily from rapid increase in the school age population has been met by expanding the education system and introducing universal access to primary education. The proportion of the total national budget allocated to education has increased from 6.5% in 1971 to over 22% in 1994. During 1998, the education sector accounted for 25% of the national budget.
12. As a result of this substantial investment in education, remarkable achievements have been made with 83% of the primary school age population being in school in 1991. There is almost 100% access in 1999 from primary to junior secondary. Total literacy rate has increased from 34.0% in 1981 to 69 percent in 1994; with literacy rates for males and females estimated at 67 and 70% respectively.
13. We are aware that all these achievements are relative and that more remains to be done. Quality, relevance of education, access and school drop-out phenomenon are issues of concern.

14. Given the high growth rate of the population, the school age population is expected to grow rapidly and so will the demand for resources to provide additional school places and facilities. Against the background of the projected slowing down of the growth in Government revenues, it may become increasingly difficult to raise the level of resources to be allocated to education. High population growth rate may therefore render the progress achieved to date unsustainable.
15. Botswana is unevenly and sparsely populated. The most noticeable aspect of this is the movement into the urban areas and the shift from the north eastern to the south eastern districts where more than 80% of the population is currently residing.
16. The rapidity of urban growth and issues of how to incorporate migrants into the urban economy remain matters of concern especially as the rural poor move into urban areas in search of job opportunities and exert pressure on demand for basic facilities such as housing, infrastructure and other social services, which in turn increase resource consumption and environmental stress.
17. In spite of efforts to increase housing stock nation-wide, urban areas continue to experience severe housing shortages as a result of rapid population growth and urbanisation. Continued high population growth and increased rural-urban migration will further accentuate the housing problem.

Mr President,

18. Agriculture's share in the economic activities has continued to decline over time, from 4.7% in 1990 to 3.4% in 1997. As a result of a combination of factors, notably the recurring and severe drought spells that ravaged arable farming productivity in the sub-sector has been low. Pastoral farming is similarly affected. The limited availability of fertile arable land coupled with scarce and unreliable rainfall, has seriously affected the country's capacity to produce sufficient food to feed its rapidly growing population. In addition, the poor performance of the arable sub-sector has led to a deterioration in rural incomes and income distribution which, in turn has influenced migration and other demographic trends.

19. Another major challenge facing our country is that of women empowerment. The empowerment of women is an important factor for any future demographic, social and economic changes in society. Various socio-cultural values, norms and laws act as barriers to women's full participation in the development process, particularly in decision making. As a consequence, most women are accorded low socio-economic status and have limited control over their rights; a situation which has called for the review of discriminatory laws against women to eliminate gender disparities.
20. Men usually play a key role in production and reproduction decisions. They exercise powers in decision regarding family size and use of contraceptives. However, the participation of men in family matters especially family planning has been identified as lacking. Special awareness creation programmes targeted at males are necessary to promote the active involvement of men in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behaviour, including family planning.
21. The Government and relevant NGOs' have held numerous workshops at various levels before and after the Dakar and Beijing conferences to articulate clearly the major gender concerns and issues that need urgent attention. In addition, gender issues and concerns have been integrated into the National Population Policy, the Policy on Women in Development as well as the National Gender Programme which provide guidelines on critical areas of concern. Government has committed itself to implement the strategies in the ICPD, the African and Beijing Platforms of Action. Further, the political environment is conducive to promoting changes in laws, policies and programmes with a view to achieving gender equality. Work has already started in this direction.

Mr. President,

22. Botswana has become party to the ICPD Programme of Action and other world conventions and therefore remain committed to the spirit of Cairo and others. We call upon our cooperating partners to recommit themselves and assist the developing countries who lack resources and capacity to meet planned targets in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ICPD Programme of Action. One of the major concerns is the issue of mobilisation of resources for the implementation of the population programmes.

23. In this regard, and in line with the recommendations of the ICPD Programme of Action, Government adopted a National Population Policy in August 1997. The Policy addresses the major concerns critical to the growth, structure and characteristics of the population and provides strategies to influence them in a manner conducive to the attainment of sustainable human development.
24. The overall goal of the Policy is “improved quality of life and standard of living for all people in Botswana; with the cardinal elements of reduced population growth rate, low fertility, low morbidity and mortality and a balanced population distribution”.
25. A National Implementation Plan of Action which operationalises the objectives and the strategies of the policy into focused interventions is being finalised. Also a National Population Communication Strategy has been developed as an integral part of the Plan of Action. Translating the strategies of the Policy into implementable activities with observable and measurable outcomes remains the major challenge of Government in the years ahead.

I thank you.