

Chapter 4

Botswana's Novel Approaches for Knowledge-Based Economy Facilitation: Issues, Policies and Contextual Framework

Bwalya Kelvin Joseph
University of Botswana, Botswana

ABSTRACT

The Vision 2016, which is a set of strategic plans desired to position Botswana at the complete edge of the socio-economic hierarchy in Africa, is being implemented with concerted efforts from both the private and the public sector, including ordinary citizens. One of the major motivations for drawing this strategy has been the desire to transform Botswana from a resource and industry-based (e.g. agriculture and diamond mining) to knowledge-based economy. This has come from the realisation that in order to compete favourably at a global scale, there is need to put in place efficient knowledge value chains. To this course, several initiatives have been devised and/or implemented by both the government and the public sector. This article surveys the fundamental concepts on which this paradigm shift is hinged and brings out the different issues, initiatives and policies (such as Information and Communications Technology development, nurturing of an appropriate human resource base by way of strategic human resource development plans, investment in intellectual capital, etc.) that have been done so far in Botswana. The article, however, does not claim that it offers a compendium of existing programs towards a knowledge-based economy initiated by Botswana. The article posits that although significant strides have been scored in Botswana's efforts towards a knowledge-based economy, a lot more needs to be done if it were to compete favourably at an international stage.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The recent world economic recession which has largely impacted negatively on the income levels from diamond sells, etc., have forced countries such as Botswana to think twice about their economic mainstay. Botswana has been over-dependent on agriculture and the diamond mining industry for over 3 decades. However, these industries are not sustainable to a more or lesser extent. It is for this reason that Botswana has started shifting towards a Knowledge-Based-Economy (KBE). This strategy is enveloped into the Vision 2016 national vision which aims to improve the socio-economic standing of Botswana. This strategy is hinged on encouraging creativity and innovation and will be spear-headed by the recently established Botswana Innovation Hub (BIH) – which is a localized version of the Malaysian ICT hub model.

Towards a knowledge-based society, there have been several efforts that have been authored at the regional level, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocol on communications and transport. The logic of this is that initiatives at regional levels have been seen to work e.g. the ESEMK project implemented in the European Union whose main objective was to discuss the possible emergence of a specific European socio-economic model of development in the context of the transition towards a knowledge-based society (Amable & Lung, 2005).

The background to this motivation can also be extended to looking at the value that a KBE brings to the fore in countries such as China, Singapore, Mexico, South Korea, Brazil etc. that have dedicated strategies towards transforming to KBEs. Kuznetsov and Dahlman (2008) have carefully looked at the factors that have affected the transition to KBEs of Mexico and South Korea given their difference in contextual and location aspects. For the Mexican case, the importance of education and institutional reform, encouragement of innovation and entrepreneurship, efficient

application of information and communications technologies (ICTs), replication of scientific discoveries in all sectors of the socio-economic sectors, and knowledge revolution contributed a lot to Mexico's transition to a knowledge-based economy. Korea presents a growth model largely based on diversified conglomerates e.g. Daewoo, Samsung Electronics, LG Electronics, KIA motors, Hyundai Motors, etc. (Kuznetsov & Dahlman, 2008). The strategy authored to place Korea at a competitive edge was also partially based on developing their R&D potential. The start point of this development dimension was human development (e.g. massive and effective training) so a strong human resource base is created. This was necessary as one of the major resources that Korea has is its efficient human resource base. Within this framework, human development was extended even to traditional universities through the Brain-21 Korea aimed at encouraging research done by faculty and Masters/PhD students. There was also encouraged a culture that promotes efficient knowledge management at all levels of the socio-economic value chains. The result of these interventions is clearly seen both in Mexico and in Korea as these countries can competent favorably in world economic and knowledge value chains. The aforementioned countries have also seen themselves growing their Gross Domestic Products (GDPs), improving their public service delivery and business processes to fuel the nation's socio-economic mechanisms, etc. These economies have undergone significant structural changes. It is to be noted that propensity to change can be a major factor in determining whether KBE is established or not.

African countries either solely depending on agriculture or mining are slowly transforming into industrial economies where natural resources and labour are the main resources. The current trend is that these countries are now transforming into KBEs where knowledge is the key resource. This is in cahoots with the reasoning brought forward by Leung (2004) that for countries to thrive in this

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