

# The Crossroads that Were Never Meant to Be: An Account of Promises and Challenges in an Orphan's Empowerment Journey

**Oitshepile MmaB Modise**  
*University of Botswana, Botswana*

**Rebecca Nthogo Lekoko**  
*University of Botswana, Botswana*

## **ABSTRACT**

*Today's world faces challenges of increased number of orphans. In Botswana, HIV/AIDS scourge widens figures and poverty increases vulnerability. Beyond existing empowerment supporting schemes, and policies, orphans are responsible for complementing government's efforts. In this chapter, the orphan had hoped for economic empowerment through his old barber shop. His hope was drowned when he got a kiosk instead of barber equipment. The kiosk in his yard stands as a promise of government support, on the other hand, it is a symbol of no voice and choice over improvement of his future life. Challenges to improvement include government's prescriptive procedures and bureaucracy. These challenges have in turn created self-doubt, bitterness and a feeling of betrayal on his part. This chapter illustrates that for empowerment strategies to succeed, there should be synergy between beneficiaries' needs and government support. Monitoring too is an essential part of successful practices.*

## INTRODUCTION

The case reported here is that of an orphan who is a citizen of Botswana. He is given a pseudo name Orx for ethical and professional reasons. In the context of Botswana, Vision 2016 sets a tone for support and inclusion of orphans in government services by emphatically stating that no one should be disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth. It thus compels the government and their agents to ensure that orphans especially the poor ones are not disadvantaged in life because of having lost parents who, in most cases, were breadwinners.

Support for orphans varies, for example, psychosocial support is an important component of any intervention aimed at improving the lives of orphans and vulnerable children (Boler & Carroll, 2003; Strebel, 2004; Miller, 2007). The Botswana government has also focused attention on providing restorative activities such as education, health, food, occupational and revenue generating activities to help these children lead a dignified life and have hope for the future. An important *raison d'être* for these interventions is to ensure that these children are protected from further social ills associated with poverty and vulnerability.

BIDPA (2007) reports a significant amount spent on the care of orphans, for example, in 2000 to 2001, Botswana had expended about P7 million and in 2002–2003 the figure had risen to P34 million. BIDPA further reports that in 2003/04, a more significant rise occurred amounting to P150 million while in 2004/05, the amount escalated to P212 million, making the orphan care program the most costly of all the social safety net programs. Against the background given above of the importance of paying attending to the welfare of orphans, this chapter focuses on an individual poor young adult orphan in the outskirts of the city of Gaborone called Old Naledi. This place started as a squatter place some years back and now has developed into a big residential place with modern brick-walled houses and some shacks. The place is mainly characterized by dwellings for the very poor. Many of these structures are bricks and roofed with corrugated iron. Many people in this location are not working. Some households have thus built rental units as source of survival. In some cases, this has led to overcrowding. The situation is complicated by sewages like pit latrines, some not maintained well. This is a place in which 'Orx' (pseudo-name) lives with his relatives.

As already stated, Orx may not pass the test of an orphan as per international standards and especially using the World Bank's (2004) definition. If age is used as the sole descriptor, he is already over 18 years of age and now a young adult, but still a youth as per the definition of Botswana (12-35 years). Apart from age, Orx exhibits all other characteristics of an orphan, the basic being both parents are late and he has no one to support. Also, he is still a youth.

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