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# **Drought Relief and the Origins of a Conservative Welfare State in Botswana, 1965-1980**

Jeremy Seekings

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#### About the author:

Jeremy Seekings is Professor of Political Studies and Sociology at the University of Cape Town.

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# Drought Relief and the Origins of a Conservative Welfare State in Botswana, 1965-1980

## Abstract

*Drought played – and continues to play – a central role in welfare state-building across much of Africa. Botswana was perhaps the first major case of this, with drought in the mid-1960s prompting policy reforms that were to lead to the construction, decades later, of an extensive but conservative welfare state. Drought forced the colonial government and then the government headed by Seretse Khama to address aspects of poverty that might otherwise have been ignored. Emergency food aid was replaced by school and other feeding programmes, food-for-work programmes, and modest food relief for other ‘destitutes’. Drought relief in Botswana in the 1960s and 1970s was provided not only on an unprecedented scale but was also institutionalised through programmes administered by a dedicated national and local bureaucracy, independent of the chiefs, and in association with a new international agency, the World Food Programme. Drought also prompted and shaped the development of a normative doctrine of public welfare provision and a new understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the newly independent state to its citizens.*

## Introduction

At independence in 1966, most Batswana were poor and malnourished, almost no children went to secondary school, and health care was limited. The government was dependent on massive budget support from Britain. Moreover, the new country was surrounded by South Africa, South African-occupied South-West Africa, and the settler state of Southern Rhodesia, with only the ferry crossing over the Zambezi at Kazungula connecting it to another non-settler state (and even this connection was cut temporarily after the Southern Rhodesians bombed the ferry in 1979). Over the following twenty years, however, Botswana’s diamond-fuelled economy grew faster than any other economy in the world, with an average annual growth rate of about 8 percent. By 1998 GDP per capita in Botswana was, in real terms, ten times higher than at independence.

Whilst the state saw itself – and has been seen – primarily as a successful ‘developmental state’, it also rebuilt itself as a welfare state, albeit a conservative one. Public education and health care expanded. By the late 1980s almost all children were completing primary school and progressing to secondary school, and secondary school enrolment was rising steadily (passing 50 percent in the early 1990s). The ratio of doctors to people rose fourfold by 1989. Almost all births were attended by trained medical personnel and almost all children were immunised against major diseases. The under-five child mortality rate halved between 1966 and 1982.<sup>1</sup> More unusually, provision for the poor expanded through institutionalised public employment programmes, social pensions for the elderly, school and other feeding programmes, and grants for orphans. By the 2000s, Botswana had an extensive but parsimonious welfare state, focused on economic growth and social stability but protecting most of its citizens against extreme poverty. Almost all children and many adults received free food rations, and one in ten people received individual cash transfers, often on behalf of their entire households. The state provided a de facto guarantee against not only starvation but also severe malnutrition, during non-drought as well as drought years (Seekings, 2016a; Hamer, 2016).<sup>2</sup>

Much of the expansion of welfare provision was formalised in the 1990s and 2000s. First, in 1991, drought relief was formally institutionalised in the country’s 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan, meaning that budgets were planned in advance. Old-age pensions were introduced in 1996. In 1997, the government took over the school feeding programme from the World Food Programme (WFP). Concern over AIDS orphans led to the adoption of an Orphan Care Programme.<sup>3</sup> These reforms were framed by the adoption, in 1997, of *Vision 2016*, which set out principles for national development in what Werbner characterises as the founding “ideological manifesto” of the country’s leadership (Werbner, 2004: 17). Other poverty-focused policies were reformed, and a National Strategy for Poverty Reduction was finalised in 2003. Public employment programmes were expanded.

A series of scholars have shown that these initiatives had roots in preceding decades. Holm and Morgan first drew attention to the strong and effective relief programmes mounted in the early 1980s (Holm & Morgan, 1985; Valentine, 1993: but see Simmons & Lyons, 1992). Wylie (1989) noted the presence of drought relief in the 1980s, in apparent contrast to the absence of any such relief

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<sup>1</sup> Data from the World Bank’s ‘World Development Indicators’ (see <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>); see also Botswana (1991).

<sup>2</sup> With the important caveat that the San population was neglected (Good, 1999; Saugestad, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> See forthcoming work by Isaac Chinyoka.

in the 1930s and 1940s. Solway (1994) described the drought of the 1980s as a ‘watershed event’, precipitating dramatic changes in both the practice and the meaning of public policy as the state inserted itself in new ways into the lives of its citizens. The case of Botswana drew international applause also. De Waal (1997) identified the early 1980s drought relief programme as exemplary. Other scholars point to the antecedent of the 1978-79 drought. Von Braun, Teklu & Webb assert that Botswana’s drought relief program “began in the late 1970s and was put to the test in the 1978-79 drought” (Von Braun, Teklu & Webb, 1999: 146). Munemo also traces the roots of Botswana’s drought relief policy to the drought of 1978-79 as well as the much more severe drought of 1981-86 (Munemo, 2012).

In this paper I argue that the basic programmatic and institutional architecture of drought relief and hence the welfare state in Botswana can be traced back even earlier, to the drought that preceded and accompanied independence in September 1966, and the drought relief operation that was implemented in response.<sup>4</sup> In a companion paper, I show also that the drought shaped fundamentally the ideological framework developed by Seretse Khama, the country’s first Prime Minister (1965-66) and then president, his vice-president (and successor) Quett Masire and their Bechuanaland (and then Botswana) Democratic Party (BDP) between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. Analysing speeches, party documents and state documents reveals how drought framed the BDP leadership’s understanding of not only poverty<sup>5</sup> but also and more broadly the roles of state, market and kin in meeting people’s basic needs in the new Botswana (Seekings, 2016b). Drought thus led to both the architecture of policy and institutions, and a corresponding doctrine of welfare provision.

In conjunction with the WFP, the government of Botswana adopted a three-fold approach to drought, comprising food-for-work programmes for the able-bodied (forming the basis of ‘self-help’ projects), feeding programmes for school-children and ‘vulnerable groups’, and (at least in principle) ‘destitute’ relief for the elderly and other poor who were without (or had been abandoned by) kin. The cost was the equivalent of at least 2 percent of GDP in drought years and at least 1 percent of GDP on average, with direct benefits reaching perhaps one

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<sup>4</sup> Only Picard seems to have noted the institutionalisation of drought relief in the 1960s. “Early food distribution was of an emergency nature, but as the worst effects of the drought were halted, it became government policy to link food supplement programs with village self-help projects” through food-for-work programmes funded from the government’s development budget and administered through newly-established village development committees (Pickard, 1987: 235-6). The general neglect of the earlier period might be due to the paucity of researchers until the late 1970s, and the fact that the University of Botswana was only opened in 1982.

<sup>5</sup> See Werbner (2004: 19-20) for a discussion of ‘understood poverty’ in Botswana.

half of the population. Even before the 1978-79 drought it was clear that Botswana needed to institutionalise its response to drought and poverty rather than respond in an ad hoc manner. Drought and drought relief were shaped by and in turn shaped the ideology being developed within the BDP. The BDP celebrated rural life, self-help and community, weaving these into a conservative ideology of social justice that decried excessive inequality and legitimated targeted interventions. Both the emergency policies and the emerging doctrine provided foundations for the subsequent institutionalisation of a conservative welfare state.

Tilly (1975) famously remarked that “wars make states” as much as “states make war”. This is in part because wars sometimes require states, especially democratic states, to forge new social contracts with their citizens through social and economic policies. Droughts and other disasters also play an important if generally neglected role in state-building – including in the USA. Dauber (2013) demonstrates how federal intervention in the economy in the 1930s (i.e. the New Deal) was premised on a long history of federal disaster relief. The poor could be represented as deserving because they were blameless in the face of mixed natural and ‘man-made’ economic disasters, as shown in the enduringly poignant photographs of Dorothea Lange and the novels of John Steinbeck, and as argued in Congress and the courts. The New Deal welfare state could provide for able-bodied adults not because of any acceptance of universalistic conceptions of citizenship or even need – as in much of north-west Europe – but because the Depression was represented as being as a natural calamity that had overwhelmed the ability of ordinary people to provide for themselves and transformed them into the deserving poor.

The USA was unusual among the advanced capitalist countries in that the risks prompting welfare-state-building included the risk of drought. In Africa and South Asia, however, drought (and to a much lesser extent floods) played a major role in welfare-state-building. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Britain sought to steer its colonies down the path of ‘development’ in explicit contrast to the path of ‘welfare’ that had been laid out for Britain itself in the 1942 Beveridge Report (Seekings, 2010). Colonial officials embraced an agrarian doctrine of development that sought to transform struggling smallholders into thriving peasants through massive interventions in agricultural production and marketing (Low & Lonsdale, 1976; Cooper, 1997; Beinart, 1984). Whilst men in some areas were encouraged or pushed into migrant labour, permanent urbanisation (and ‘detrribalisation’) was generally discouraged (or prevented). ‘Social welfare’ officers would solve through ‘community development’ the ‘problems’ (such as ‘juvenile delinquency’) that arose in urban settings where ‘traditional’ norms and relations had regrettably broken down (Lewis, 2000; Fourchard, 2006). In a few other colonies (including Mauritius and Barbados), de-

agrarianisation propelled British colonial officials towards welfare reforms along British lines, including especially old-age pensions (Seekings, 2007, 2011). Across most of Africa, however, an agrarian doctrine of development and welfare held sway. In these colonies, drought posed a particularly fundamental challenge to this approach, because it revealed the limits to this ideal agrarian model. The rising tide of nationalist demands for independence fuelled the imperative of mitigating the consequences of drought. Arid Botswana was on the frontline of state-building in response to this challenge.

Solway has interpreted the droughts in Botswana between 1979 and 1987 in terms of the concept of a ‘revelatory crisis’ (a concept borrowed from Marshall Sahlins’ *Stone Age Economics* (1972: 128, 141, 143)). For Solway, herself rooted in Marxian political economy, the drought exposed the ‘structural contradictions’ in the ‘existing order’ during a ‘critical historical juncture’ in Botswana:

‘Structural contradictions such as those between household and kindred, between individualised and communal property claims, between production for market and production for subsistence, between the state’s vision of “rational” peasant production and the realities of daily economic life in the rural areas, and those between classes, were revealed to varying degrees and in different ways both to the outside observer and to the participants themselves’.

Not only had conditions in rural areas deteriorated irreversibly, in part through commercialisation and class formation, but the state’s response entailed inserting itself ‘in the lives of citizens in new and expanded ways’. At the same time, she suggests (without much discussion), the drought served as ‘a perfect scapegoat’, obscuring the underlying ‘socio-economic problems’, in part through ideological innovation (Solway, 1994: 471-3).

My analysis in this paper is informed by Solway’s analysis, but goes beyond it in several respects. First, I argue that the policy and ideological frameworks predated the 1979-87 droughts, and should be traced back to the droughts of the 1960s. Secondly, locating the ‘crisis’ in the 1960s rather than the 1980s requires that more attention is paid to the nature of the new state and less to class formation. Thirdly, the importance of drought was not only that it revealed underlying social or economic shifts, but also that it demanded – in the political context of the 1960s – immediate and practical programmatic and institutional reforms. Finally, as I show not here but in the companion paper, ideological production cannot be simply read off the underlying crisis: Khama, Masire and the BDP *chose* how to respond, practically and ideologically.

## Drought and relief in Britain's colonies

British colonial officials in Africa lagged behind their counterparts in India in terms of developing drought relief programmes. In India, in the nineteenth century, famines prompted the appointment of a series of official Commissions of Enquiry and the elaboration of famine relief policy (Sharma, 2001). The secretary of the 1878-80 Famine Commission drafted a 'Famine Code' that set out how to anticipate and respond to famine. Famine Codes enshrined a discourse that Indian nationalists used in criticism of imperial inaction, forcing the imperial authorities into an unwritten contract to prevent famine – although this contract failed spectacularly in Bengal in 1942-43, when the imperial government failed to ensure either adequate supplies of food at prices that the poor could afford (Brennan, 1988).

The drought relief proposed by the Famine Codes reflected nineteenth century liberal thought in Britain: free food should be limited to the truly 'destitute' whilst the able-bodied poor should earn food through food-for-work programmes. As the imperial administration explained in the preface to the 1888 Punjab Famine Code, it was the 'duty of Government to organize operations for the relief of distress and mortality' when a natural calamity affected 'a material portion of the population in any locality', going beyond their capacity to remedy. Measures should not 'check thrift or impair the existing structure of Native society. ... Gratuitous relief therefore, either in the form of house-to-house relief, or of relief at poor-houses, must be restricted as far as possible; and the leading principle in which assistance will be based will be the provision of work for all who are able to earn their living.' Relief work should be piece-work, and the wage should be 'the lowest amount sufficient to maintain healthy life under given circumstances. While the duty of the Government is to save life, it is not bound to maintain the laboring community at its normal level of comfort. To do so would be unjust to other sections of the community, besides prolonging the period for which the laboring population would cling to the relief works.' In addition to discussing in detail arrangements for both relief work and gratuitous relief (in either cash or grain), the Code also laid out measures for the preservation of cattle.<sup>6</sup>

The Famine Codes (and subsequent manuals) were passed on at independence and embraced by the new Indian Government. McAlpin (1987: 401) quotes an Indian civil servant in 1958 saying that this combination was in part "to minimize the charity aspect of relief by associating it with some kind of useful work so as to prevent a dole mentality and consequent demoralisation".

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<sup>6</sup> 'Remarks', preface to the Punjab Famine Code 1888 (British Library, India Office Records V/27/831/51).

Colonial officials in Africa faced regular famines, and sometimes responded with limited relief programmes. Officials in the Sudan borrowed from the Indian Famine Code to draft their 1920 Sudan Famine Regulations (De Waal, 1989), although they lacked the administrative capacity of the Indian colonial state and conditions were very different in that famine in Sudan was *not* the consequence of insufficient opportunities for employment, as was the case in India, which meant that public employment programmes were less appropriate (De Waal, 1997). In South Africa, as in India, the state had long recognised that it had to play an active role despite a generally efficient private trading system and widespread migrant labour. Maize was purchased, if necessary from abroad, and dispensed by magistrates as ‘pauper rations’ and for ‘relief work’ (i.e. food-for-work on public works programmes). In 1946, £26,000 was allocated to magistrates to respond to famine in the Eastern Cape (Wylie, 2001: Ch. 3). Famine and malnutrition in the Eastern Cape were a significant factor in demands (including from both magistrates and the employers of rural migrant labourers) for the South African old-age pension programme to be extended to black men and women. In 1944, the government acceded to these demands (Seekings, 2005).

In Southern Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), officials “developed a system of relief comparable to (but apparently not drawn directly from) the Indian Famine Codes” (Iliffe, 1990: 10). In the Southern Rhodesian case,

‘famine policy ... rested on two principles. One, already orthodox policy in India and South Africa, was to rely wherever possible on private trade. ... The second principle ... was that men should earn money to buy food by migrating to wage employment, the demand for labour being such at this time that there was no suggestion of opening the public works which were the normal means of relieving famine in the labour-surplus societies of India’ (*ibid*: 38-9).

Officials’ liberal economic instincts were challenged when the market failed to provide sufficient food at affordable prices. In each of four successive famines – in 1903, 1912, 1916 and 1922 – officials went further in securing and transporting food supplies, and dispensing food from distribution centres to ‘destitutes’ for free and to able-bodied adults on credit or in return for labour on road-building or other public works programmes. But officials subsequently backtracked on their earlier benevolence. Through the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s, they relied entirely on private traders supplying food to drought-affected areas, and migrants’ remittances paying for it, so that the state was not required to organise any relief operations (*ibid*).

In the face of severe drought in southern parts of Nyasaland (later Malawi) in 1949, colonial officials organised a minimalist drought relief programme, first for the small urban population (in Blantyre) then for the very much larger rural population (in the surrounding countryside). Food distribution focused on the sale of food rations. “The government was determined to keep free issues to the minimum, and initially reserved these for the old and infirm”, writes Vaughan. Faced with cashless poor people, and “in order not to increase the number of free issues, District Commissioners began organising ‘food-for-work’ schemes, whereby able-bodied men and women could earn the food they were required but were unable to buy”. As evidence of severe malnutrition emerged, and reluctant to lower the price of food, officials opened feeding camps where the “old and destitute were kept behind barbed wire and fed twice a day on thin porridge” (Vaughan, 1985: 194; 1987: 43-6). Officials rejected calls for expanded free food relief because, in the words of one of them, “the whole thing would snowball and become a crippling financial liability in a very short time”, and would undermine the “African system of social security” (quoted by Iliffe, 1984). Mandala concurs:

‘Officials in Malawi lacked the resources or the will to mount meaningful relief programs ... [T]he British in Malawi did not create a state upon which a hungry person could rely ... [P]easants in Malawi conquered famine with their own resources’ (2005: 117).

Drawing on her research on Nyasaland and limited secondary studies elsewhere in Africa before and after independence, Vaughan points to the limits to drought relief policies: “Nowhere in Africa, it seems, if you are starving can you be sure that relief will come your way ...” (1987: 16). This was probably not true in either South Africa or Southern Rhodesia, at least from the 1910s, but may well have been true elsewhere. It certainly seems to have been true in Bechuanaland prior to the 1960s. The policy of the colonial governments seems to have been premised on the idea – prevalent across most of Africa – that ‘traditional’ social arrangements addressed poverty in rural areas. This meant leaving the redress of famine to the chiefs. Schapera recorded that “every member of a tribe ... is entitled to ... relief in case of destitution, famine or some other calamity”, and that it was “the duty of the chief and other tribal authorities ... to assist [every man] with food whenever necessary” through distributing corn from his own granaries (1994 [1938]: 68-9, 123). The Protectorate did make provision for exceptional ‘destitutes’, through what was in effect poor relief (although, unlike in South Africa, there was no specific poor law).<sup>7</sup> A colonial welfare officer was

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<sup>7</sup> In 1938-39, for example, £250 were allocated to destitutes in Bechuanaland, later supplemented with an additional £100. Most of the beneficiaries were ‘poor whites’, including a disabled white adolescent and her child, and some other poor white children who officials thought needed to be removed from ‘native reserves’. One documented beneficiary

appointed for the Protectorate in 1946, with a very meagre budget to deal with specifically urban indigence. This was part of an Empire-wide concern with ‘social welfare’, understood at the time primarily in terms of social problems such as juvenile delinquency associated with urbanisation and ‘detrribalisation’ (Lewis, 2000). The primary achievement of the Bechuanaland welfare officer was to organize boy scout and girl guide groups. Just prior to independence, the welfare officer began to promote ‘community development’, and assisted the formation of village development committees (Wass, 1972). The colonial administration emphasized the shift from ‘pure Welfare’ to ‘positive, constructive Community Development’, and the colonial department was renamed Community Development.<sup>8</sup> In and when drought did result in severe need, beyond the capacity or will of chiefs to address, the colonial government seems to have largely ignored it (e.g. Rey, 1988: 129, 135).

## **Emergency relief in Botswana, 1965-66**

The drought that hit Bechuanaland just prior to its achievement of independence (as Botswana) was exceptionally severe. The Protectorate had always been prone to drought, but the drought of the early 1960s was the worst since the previous century (Colclough & McCarthy, 1980: 32). Conditions had steadily worsened over almost a decade. In 1957, regional drought in the north-west and west had necessitated drought relief. Two years later, in 1959, drought affected most of the country. In 1960, “severe drought conditions prevailed over much of the territory”, resulting in “great mortality among livestock and low crop yields”. Severe and prolonged drought was experienced in 1961-62, continuing through 1963, 1964 and 1965 (Sandford, 1977: 24). Up to 1957, the Bechuanaland Protectorate has been self-sufficient in food, but from 1958 had to import maize, in growing volumes. As the drought persisted and deepened, the effects went beyond arable production to cattle mortality, as cattle starved or were pre-emptively culled in large numbers. Having remained stable up to 1964, the cattle population fell by almost one-third between 1964 and 1966 (Sandford, 1977: 25). In April 1966, Seretse Khama told the new colonial parliament that this was “the worst drought in living memory, resulting from a succession of five years or more of very poor rains”.<sup>9</sup>

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was a ‘native’ (called Chabe) who had been assaulted by two (white) South Africans, leaving him disabled (UK National Archives, DO 35/944/1).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Notes for Her Majesty’s opening address to 1964 administration conference’, Botswana National Archives, Social Welfare Development, Box 2 So.W 3. I am grateful to Sam Hamer for providing me with this information.

<sup>9</sup> Khama, Presidential Address to the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Bechuanaland Democratic Party, 9-10 April 1966, extracted in Carter and Morgan (1980).

The colonial administration began to get anxious about food in 1963. The budget for 1963/64 provided £14,000 for school feeding programmes. The British NGO Oxfam also granted about £10,000 for emergency seed subsidies and road-building. There was some discussion of a programme for the relief of destitutes, but it does not seem that it was effected. In 1964/65, the school feeding budget was increased to almost £25,000, with an additional £14,000 for mothers and pre-school age children. More than £23,000 was budgeted for emergency relief works.<sup>10</sup>

Poor or no rains in early 1965 removed any prospect of any significant harvest that year; late rains (in April and May) helped somewhat with grazing for cattle, but were too late for crops. The deepening crisis posed an immediate challenge for the new colonial government, formed after elections in March 1965. The BDP, led by Seretse Khama, won the elections by a landslide, and BDP leaders formed a cabinet with Khama as Prime Minister, working with colonial officials under tight control from the Colonial Office in London. The new colonial government established a National Famine Relief Committee, which proposed various measures building on activities in previous years. In April, Oxfam's Field Director C.M. Carruthers visited Bechuanaland, and reported that the various authorities had been slow to respond to early warnings of likely drought. He claimed that he himself had prompted the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Services to prepare a document on behalf of the National Famine Relief Committee, setting out the new government's plans in response to the crisis. The document reportedly acknowledged that the drought had reached 'disastrous proportions', and an 'effective response' was beyond the resources of the colony and therefore depended on external assistance. The document proposed a mix of employment-creation and feeding programmes (including focused programmes for nursing mothers, young children and school children, as well as general free food distribution), and increased budget for the relief of 'destitutes' (especially the destitute elderly). Carruthers reported that the Cabinet accepted most of the proposals, with one modification: Whereas the NFRC had proposed that local committees dispense emergency relief in the form of cash, the BDP ministers in the Cabinet decided that they should only dispense relief in kind.<sup>11</sup>

The Cabinet was in a difficult position, for at least four reasons. Firstly, information on the scale of the crisis in remoter parts of Botswana slowly reached the civil servants, who were in the process of moving from Mafeking (over the border in South Africa) to the new capital of Gaborone. In April it appeared that food would be needed for 20,000 'destitute persons' (out of a total

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<sup>10</sup> Hand-written note, signed by A.C.Howard [of the Colonial Office, London], 24 March [1965], document 4 in file Colonial Office (CO) 1048/838 (UK National Archives).

<sup>11</sup> CO 1048/838.

population of about 600,000). By May, this figure had tripled to 60,000, and it was thought that it might rise to 90,000. Secondly, the Colonial Office in London continued to control the purse strings, and had to approve any unbudgeted expenditures – which it was slow to do. Thirdly, even when expenditures were approved, the fact that the drought affected South Africa also meant that it was becoming more and more difficult to buy the necessary food locally. Finally, even when the food arrived in Bechuanaland, there were insufficient trucks to transport it to the parts of the country where it was needed.<sup>12</sup>

In the course of April and May a plan took shape. Lacking authorisation from the Colonial Office to spend beyond its approved budget, the Bechuanaland government established a National Relief Fund to raise funds from the public, and negotiated with Oxfam to spend the unspent balance of the 1964 relief grant on public works programmes, with the goal of getting money to poor families as much as building roads and dams. The National Relief Fund was expected to raise £10,000 (i.e. R20,000) and the balance on the Oxfam grant was reported to be R40,000. Most importantly, initial contact with the WFP raised the prospect of large-scale food aid.<sup>13</sup>

The WFP had been formed only a few years before, in 1961. For years America had produced more food than it consumed, and American farmers successfully lobbied the federal government to purchase food stocks at high prices for distribution or sale elsewhere. Through the 1950s the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) – a UN agency – pushed for food surpluses to be used for developmental purposes as well as emergency relief in poor countries. US President Eisenhower established and his successor President Kennedy expanded the distribution of food to the poor in the USA and elsewhere under ‘Public Law 480’, which was later called the ‘Food for Peace’ programme. In 1961, the Kennedy administration and FAO agreed to establish a new multilateral emergency food aid programme, the WFP, initially as a three-year experiment (for 1963-65).

In both Bechuanaland and London, poorly-informed officials initially thought that they could access American surplus food directly from the USA, under the Food for Peace programme. They soon turned their attention to the WFP as a conduit for food aid from the USA. In late April they applied to the WFP for emergency food relief. The WFP sent an official to assess the situation, and on his recommendation the WFP approved in late May a plan to source food from the USA for 20,000 people (under Emergency Operation 824). Rations would

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Information Note’, on Cabinet meetings on 7 April and 7 May 1965 (CO 1048/838).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

comprise yellow maize meal, skimmed milk powder and vegetable oil. The WFP budgeted \$418,000 (equivalent to £150,000) for the operation.<sup>14</sup> The food would be dispensed within Bechuanaland through District Commissioners and local relief committees. At this time, the Cabinet noted, “no special plans exist for the feeding of school children or mothers and babies”, presumably because neither food nor funds were available.<sup>15</sup> When it became clear, in early May, that the number of ‘destitutes’ requiring food was much higher than 20,000, the Bechuanaland government – through the British government – requested the WFP to provide more food, for 60,000 people. Soon after, the WFP was asked also for 10,000 tons of maize for cattle feed.<sup>16</sup>

The WFP food was not expected to arrive until July. In the meantime, the Colonial Office approved a paltry additional £1,000 for interim purchases, but the Batswana would have to rely primarily on their own fund-raising (through the National Relief Fund). Strikes in American ports were delaying food shipments. The Minister for Labour and Social Services reported to the Cabinet that the WFP food would not arrive until September.<sup>17</sup> The WFP and Zambian government agreed that 143 tons of WFP maize en route to Zambia could be diverted to Botswana, whose need was more immediate. The Minister reported that approximately 13-14,000 Batswana were being fed and, contrary to sensational press reports, children were not dying of hunger. But, he insisted, “there is no room for complacency” given that “the full impact of famine [will] only reveal itself around August/September”.<sup>18</sup> The WFP also agreed to pay for 500 tons of maize to be purchased in South Africa to meet immediate needs. The Colonial Office was, however, shocked out of its complacency: the Secretary of State approved expenditure of R70,000 (£35,000) per month from August until the arrival of WFP food supplies, for the purchase of food through commercial channels, as well as £70,000 for drilling new boreholes and £30,000 for labour-intensive development projects (to be funded out of the colony’s allocation from Colonial Development and Welfare funds). Oxfam also approved £5,000 for boreholes and £30,000 for subsidised sorghum seed supplies and the construction of dams, in addition to unspent funds from the previous grant.<sup>19</sup>

Through August and September the NFRC coordinated food supplies on an ad hoc basis, scrabbling to ensure adequate supplies for the coming weeks without

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Emergency Operations: Report by the [WFP] Executive Director’, Agenda Item 5 for the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 11-15 October 1965 (WFP/IGC 8/5, dated 12 August 1965).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Information Note’ on Cabinet meeting of 7 May 1965 (CO 1048/838).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> ‘Information Note’ on Cabinet meeting, 15 July 1965 (CO 1048/838).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> ‘Emergency Operations: Report by the Executive Director’ (12 August 1965).

succeeding in denting the anticipated shortfall over the following months. Besides the 143 tons of WFP maize diverted from Zambia, 500 tons had been purchased in South Africa by the WFP and 615 tons by the Bechuanaland government (with the funds approved by the Colonial Office). Even without much food to distribute, distribution was impaired by a shortage of transport. By the end of August, the National Relief Fund had spent almost all of the R37,000 it had raised, on maize and trucks to deliver it. The WFP approved the request for cattle feed, but it would not arrive until October. The WFP refused to purchase cattle feed in South Africa in the meantime. The South African government did offer free cattle feed, but the Bechuanaland Cabinet declined the offer, suggesting instead that they borrowed cattle feed from South Africa and replace it when the WFP supplies arrived. The South Africans declined this proposal.<sup>20</sup>

The Colonial Office in London received complaints from Bechuanaland that food was not being distributed in sufficient quantities to the poor. The British High Commissioner in Gaborone was compelled to defend himself:

‘... not only have inexperienced Ministers recently taken on administrative functions for the first time, but they have also been confronted, by the drought, with a situation without precedent in this country. The first concern of my office has been to instil in Ministers a sense of urgency and responsibility in all questions concerned with the drought and its consequences, and in particular with famine relief. Our second concern has been to ensure that the machinery set up to deal with the problem is efficient. This has not been the easiest problem in the world, as it has necessarily involved the surrender by some Ministries of their prerogatives in certain fields to a co-ordinating committee. This group has now been functioning for some time, and has been completed only last week by the arrival of a World Food Programme expert in the supply and distributional problems of famine relief. His expertise was sorely lacking and will now be invaluable’.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, estimates of the number of destitute people needing food rose, first to 80,000, then to 100,000. In mid-September, the Bechuanaland government applied to the WFP for additional supplies of maize meal, dried milk and vegetable oil, to feed an additional 45,000 people (i.e. bringing the total to 105,000 people) from November 1965 until February 1966. This was approved in early October. Of more immediate importance was the belated arrival, in October, of the long-awaited WFP supplies, by train through South Africa.

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<sup>20</sup> CO 1048/839.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh Norman-Walker, to Archie Campbell (CO), 18<sup>th</sup> August 1965 (CO 1048/839, document 154).

Oxfam and a second charitable NGO, War on Want, provided additional lorries for the distribution of the food. Over the following months, every time a shipload of food arrived in Port Elizabeth, the news was immediately sent to Bechuanaland and London. Famine was averted shipload by shipload, week by week. In December, the WFP approved a fourth expansion of their Emergency Operation.

At the end of 1965 the High Commissioner sent London a report on the worsening drought situation. Rains had failed in most parts of the country in the final months of 1965. There would be little or no harvest in 1966, and the need for food relief would continue until mid-1967. He warned that the number of destitutes requiring food was currently 100,000, but could rise to as many as 360,000 by July 1966. More than one quarter of the cattle herd had died. The cattle feed situation was bad, despite the Colonial Office's approval of further expenditures. The priority must be to preserve a breeding herd. He concluded his covering letter, "One cannot but feel that Bechuanaland has deserved a better beginning to its independent future than providence has seen fit to order".<sup>22</sup>

Most food was being provided through the WFP, but the programme approved in June and expanded in October provided for supplies only until the end of February 1966. In late 1965, therefore, the Bechuanaland government made a further application to the WFP to continue food supplies from March. Poor rains were likely to lead to a poor harvest, at best. Moreover, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia also experienced poor harvests. The government of Southern Rhodesia banned maize exports whilst South Africa might follow suit. The Bechuanaland government therefore requested that the existing emergency feeding programme be extended for a further four months, to the end of June, and expanded to provide for 360,000 people, i.e. more than half of the population. The situation with stockfeed was a little better, because the British Government had authorised expenditure of £50,000 on stockfeed.<sup>23</sup> The WFP approved the application for food to the end of June. In a press release it was announced that the food would be distributed through food-for-work programmes and not for free.<sup>24</sup> There was some doubt, however, as to where the WFP would source the maize. In late January the WFP informed the UK and Bechuanaland governments that they would in fact be unable to supply the promised quantities of food or stock feed because of strikes at US ports and a lack of cash to purchase supplies on the open market (at a cost of at least \$1.8 million plus shipping). The WFP encouraged the British to purchase food

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<sup>22</sup> Norman-Walker to Campbell (CO), 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec 1965 (CO 1048/840).

<sup>23</sup> CO 1048/840.

<sup>24</sup> *Bechuanaland Daily News*, 18 Jan 1966.

locally.<sup>25</sup> The British approached the US State Department over these supposed delivery problems. It transpired that the problem was not delivery, as reported, but accessing supplies at very short notice. The British Government recognised that it would need to buy supplies – probably in South Africa – until the WFP succeeded in delivering grain.<sup>26</sup>

The deepening food shortages and bad news from the WFP caused consternation in Gaborone and London. In early February, the Bechuanaland government sent the Colonial Office a detailed document on ‘Proposed Famine and Drought Relief and Rehabilitation Measures’. It reported that total financial commitments to date came to more than £1.6 million. Just over one half of this comprised the value of food aid supplied or committed by the WFP for the period ending at the end of the month (£828,000). The British government had provided £348,000 in additional grant-in-aid (i.e. budgetary support for the Bechuanaland government), £220,000 for boreholes (from the Colonial Development and Welfare budget) and an additional £95,000 for cattle feed for early 1966. The National Relief Fund had raised and spent £20,000 whilst Oxfam and other charities had spent £55,000. The new National Development Bank in Bechuanaland had committed £43,000 in loans for ploughing and borehole equipment. Looking forward, the document listed ‘immediate relief measures’ (including a supplementary feeding scheme for preschool and school-going children and nursing mothers) and ‘rehabilitation measures’, each requiring about £1.3 million, i.e. a total that was substantially larger than the total value of drought-related expenditures to date. The document warned that an additional £1 million would be required if the WFP did not approve further human food, and an additional £200,000 if the WFP did not approve further stockfeed.<sup>27</sup>

These prospective costs were enormous. In late February, officials from the Colonial Office and the new Ministry of Overseas Development met in London with the British High Commissioner (Norman-Walker), the Deputy Prime Minister (Quett Masire) and officials from the in the Bechuanaland government, together with personnel from various NGOs (including Oxfam, War on Want, Freedom From Hunger, the Red Cross and volunteer organisations). When the High Commissioner tabled his list of ‘immediate relief measures’ and ‘rehabilitation measures’ – costing £2.6 million (a small part of which could be

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<sup>25</sup> Letter, misdated 24 Jan 1965 [but should be 1966] (CO 1048/838, document #E(i)33); see also ‘Terminal Report: Botswana 340’ (WFP/IGC 13/7 Add.36, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1968), Agenda Item 7, 13<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 17-24 April 1968.

<sup>26</sup> Letter, A. Campbell (Colonial Office) to C.M. LeQuesne (Foreign Office), 11 Feb 1966; cypher, FO to Washington, 15 Feb 1966; cypher, Washington to FO, 7 March 1966 (FO 371/188129).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Proposed Famine and Drought Relief and Rehabilitation Measures’, dated 10<sup>th</sup> February 1966 (CO 1048/938 document 43).

funded out of existing budget commitments) – the UK government officials said that they could not provide any funding beyond the allocation already budgeted for 1966-67. The NGOs all pleaded poverty.<sup>28</sup>

The High Commissioner's request for the continuation of human feeding and the expansion of stock feeding posed considerable financial 'difficulties' for the CO. The number of destitutes was predicted to rise to 360,000 by mid-1966, and to stay at that level until well into 1967. This would cost £252,000, mostly for the distribution (with the WFP covering the cost of maize itself). As many as 200,000 cattle would need feeding, at a cost of £664,000 in 1966/67. Limited provision for human and stock feeding (£175,000) had been made in the 1966/67 grant-in-aid (or block grant). Even taking into account the proceeds of sales of cattle feed, a shortfall of about £573,000 remained. In addition, if the WFP did not come to the table again, an additional sum – variously estimated at between £219,000 and £300,000 – would be needed to purchase human food, making a likely total shortfall of between £792,000 and £873,000 for the year. The CO concurred that it was not realistic to fund more than the budgeted £175,000 out of either the grant-in-aid (£2.25 million) or the Colonial Development and Welfare allocation (£1.3m) provided by the UK to the Protectorate. Nor was it realistic to divert anything from the Protectorate's domestic revenues (of about £2.5 million). The British Treasury refused to increase the grant-in-aid budget allocation. The CO pushed the new Overseas Development Ministry to find some money in their contingency reserves, and in April 1966 seem to have succeeded.<sup>29</sup>

The British Government was helping to finance drought relief operation, but the financial burden was mostly shouldered by the WFP. The CO's estimate of the cost of the WFP commitment was, in fact, too low. The WFP had initially committed a modest \$418,600 (i.e. £150,000) for its Emergency Operation 824.<sup>30</sup> The number of people supported grew from 20,000 to 105,000, and extended also to cattle. By the time the operation was ended, in mid-1966, the WFP had spent about \$3.5 million (i.e. £1.25 million), more than eight times the initial budget, providing 15,400 tons of maize or maize meal, about 1,500 tons of dried milk, almost 1000 tons of vegetable oil and 126 tons of dried fruit.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 'Note of a Meeting held at the Colonial Office on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1966' (CO 1048/938)..

<sup>29</sup> CO 1048/938.

<sup>30</sup> 'Emergency Operations: Report by the Executive Director' (WFP/IGC 8/5, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1965), Agenda Item 5 for the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 11-15 October 1965.

<sup>31</sup> 'Emergency Operations: Report by the Executive Director' (WFP/IGC 11/6, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1967), Agenda Item 6 for the 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 12-21 April 1967. The WFP also approved (in early 1966) but did not need to implement two

Moreover, the WFP approved in April 1966 three new applications for funding from the Bechuanaland government, for massive food-for-work and school feeding programmes, together with a cattle feed programme, as we shall see below. It is difficult to believe that the slow-moving and relatively parsimonious British Government would have been willing to allocate to Bechuanaland / Botswana resources on the scale of the WFP. The drought relief operation thus reflected the shifting global political and institutional context.

## **The shift to developmental programmes**

Speaking at the annual conference of the Bechuanaland Democratic Party (as the BDP was called prior to independence), in April 1966, the Prime Minister (Seretse Khama) spoke at length about what he called “the worst drought in living memory, resulting from a succession of five years or more of very poor rains”. The government’s ‘first duty’, he said, had been “to save the poorer sections of the population from starvation”. Free feed also had to be provided for cattle, for the first time, “to save the national herd from extinction”. The government had appealed to international agencies (especially the WFP), foreign governments and NGOs (including Oxfam). “Food was provided initially for about 65,000 destitutes”, Khama told the BDP conference; “This number has since risen to 114,000, and we anticipate that well over half the population of Bechuanaland will need to be fed before the next rainy season” (i.e. in late 1966 and early 1967).<sup>32</sup>

During 1965-66, the government was preoccupied with distributing food, initially secured on an ad hoc basis but increasingly provided through the WFP. Initial low estimates of the need for food were repeatedly revised upwards, including for longer duration. In early 1966 it became apparent that the failure of the 1965-66 rains meant that the famine would deepen and extend beyond the WFP’s emergency operation, despite its extension to the end of June 1966. The government and the WFP were confronted with the challenge of how to sustain the relief operation. For its part, the WFP was required to prioritise developmental programmes, not simply emergency relief. Developmental programmes could include food-for-work programmes (working on agricultural or infrastructural projects), land settlement, special feeding programmes (to

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further extensions to Emergency Operation 824 to ensure that there was no shortfall in food supplies before supplies arrived under the replacement ‘development’ programmes.

<sup>32</sup> Khama, Presidential Address to the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Bechuanaland Democratic Party, 9-10 April 1966; see also ‘Information Note’ on Cabinet meeting 14 April 1966 (CO 1048/939).

improve nutrition and school performance), and livestock feeding. This meshed with the preferences of the BDP leadership.

As early as April 1966, Khama – still only Prime Minister – told his party that “The supply of free food for human consumption cannot, however, go on indefinitely, and plans are already being worked out throughout the economy for a new basis of distribution”.<sup>33</sup> Discussions between the government and the WFP had already led (in March) to three new requests for aid being submitted to the WFP. The first request, for ‘Community Development and Tsetse Fly Control’, was for \$5.9 million (more than £2 million), to cover the lion’s share of the total cost of just under \$7.2 million of a food-for-work programme in urban and rural areas. Workers would construct housing and roads, and improve agricultural opportunities through destumping and clearance, soil and water conservation, and the control of tsetse flies. The initial application was for one year, but the project would be reviewed and could be extended for a further two years.<sup>34</sup> “When completed, these schemes will have reinforced the traditional sense of self-reliance which is now disappearing”, the government wrote. A total of 60,000 ‘volunteers’ would be given sufficient food for their households, so that the programme would benefit an estimated total of 360,000 people, i.e. way over half of the population.<sup>35</sup> The second request was for almost \$5.5 million (almost £2 million), to cover almost all of the total cost (of almost \$5.8 million) of a “supplementary feeding programme for school-children, mothers and pre-school children” for five years. This would cover 72,000 school children (during school terms), and 44,000 pregnant and nursing mothers attending clinics and 63,000 pre-school children through clinics (year-round).<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, the government requested \$1.2 million (£430,000) to cover one half of the total cost (of \$2.4 million) of a ‘Livestock feeding scheme’, to feed the national breeding herd from July to November 1966.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Khama, Presidential Address to BDP, 1966.

<sup>34</sup> The very small tsetse fly control programme extended beyond one year, to three years. ‘Projects for IGC approval: Summary of official request, Bechuanaland, Community Development and Tsetse Fly Control’ (WFP/IGC 9/10 Add.17, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1966), Agenda item no.9, 9<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 18-26 April 1966.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Community Development and Tsetse Fly Control: Summary of official request’ (WFP/IGC 9/10 Add.17, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1966), Agenda item no.9, 9<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 18-26 April 1966.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Supplementary feeding programme for school-children, mothers and pre-school children: Summary of official request’ (WFP/IGC 9/10 Add.18, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1966), Agenda item no.9, 9<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 18-26 April 1966.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Livestock feeding scheme: Summary of official request’ (WFP/IGC 9/10 Add.19, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1966), Agenda item no.9, 9<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 18-26 April 1966.

In April 1966, the Deputy Prime Minister (Masire), together with the Financial Secretary (Alf Beeby) and the Officer in charge of famine relief (Heady) travelled to Rome to address the WFP. Previous requests to the WFP had been routed through the British Government. The WFP approved all three requests.<sup>38</sup> These were huge grants, totalling almost \$14 million (£5 million), with one of the three programmes extending over five years. The British Government continued to provide necessary financial support also, including almost \$1 million to cover costs of transport, storage facilities and additional staff. It also paid for the purchase of stock feed when the arrival of WFP stock feed was delayed by strikes at American ports, as well as one half of the stock feed needed thereafter. The UK government's general budgetary support for the new Government of Botswana also enabled the latter to contribute to the costs of administering and distributing food aid.<sup>39</sup> Notwithstanding this, the support from the WFP did reduce the dependence of the Government of Botswana on Britain.

The new programmes were first piloted before being rolled out across the Protectorate as a whole. The school feeding programme was, according to Masire, based on one that Masire himself had developed in Kanye, when he had been school principal (Masire, 2006: 79-80). The NGOs Save the Children and Red Cross had also funded an experimental pre-school feeding programme in May and June.<sup>40</sup> Under the new WFP programme, primary school children were provided with a mid-morning meal comprising blended food and vegetable oil (Stevens, 1979: 90). A family receiving two 'rations' (for example, for the mother and preschool child) would receive benefits worth R38 per annum, whilst a family receiving three (perhaps for an additional primary school child) would receive R48. These were significant additions to the welfare of poor households (Stevens, 1978: 26-7). The new food-for-work programme was also piloted, beginning in May, under the supervision of the Community Development Officer.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the initiative may have originated with the Community Development Officer (Wass, 1972).

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<sup>38</sup> *Bechuanaland Daily News*, 25 April 1966. The food-for-work programme was WFP programme no. 323, the supplementary feeding programme was WFP programme no. 324 and the livestock feeding programme was WFP programme no. 340.

<sup>39</sup> 'Interim Appraisal Report: Botswana 323' (WFP/IGC 12/6 Add. 69, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1967), Agenda Item 6, 12<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 5-14 October 1967. The CO budgeted a total of £1.1 million for drought relief for the 1966-67 financial year.

<sup>40</sup> CO 1048/939, document 168. The WFP nonetheless later asserted that 'Before WFP food aid was provided for primary school feeding in 1966 there was no school feeding programme in the country' (WFP, 'Interim Evaluation Report: Botswana 324; WFP/IGC 19/9 Add.28, 23 February 1971; Agenda Item no.9 for the 19<sup>th</sup> session of the IGC, Rome, 29 March – 7 April 1971).

<sup>41</sup> CO 1048/939.

The food-for-work programme seems to have been the priority for the BDP government. In Khama's account, in April, the 'new system' for providing food would entail "continuing to give free supplies to all such as are incapable of earning their keep on account of illness, old age, blindness or any other form of physical incapacity", but shifting to food-for-work programmes for able-bodied men of working age. The government was already "drawing up plans for work projects throughout the country, such as the building of roads, construction of dams, making bricks for the erection of classrooms and quarters for teachers ...". The government was also purchasing tractors and ploughs to help farmers prepare the land in the absence of cattle for ploughing.<sup>42</sup> In July, the food-for-work programme formally began, providing 'able-bodied destitutes' who worked on the programme with sufficient maize and dried fruit to feed six people. "There are no rations for those who refuse to work", declared the government. Projects would include building classrooms and teachers' houses.<sup>43</sup> At some point in 1966-67 the food-for-work programme was given a formal name by the Government of Botswana: *Ipelegeng*, meaning self-help.<sup>44</sup>

The food-for-work programme was rushed into operation. District commissioners identified projects after discussions with local chiefs, headmen and councillors. For the first couple of months, priority was given to projects that required little planning or organisation, such as village cleaning, road repairs and mud brick making. By September 1966 projects were more carefully selected. The new projects included dam and water conservation schemes, school-building and making 'burnt' bricks. The WFP gushingly reported that this "stimulated the enthusiasm of the people".<sup>45</sup> Stevens (1979: 111) later reported that much of the work done had been of low standard, partly because the programme attracted people "with a low work capacity", partly because of inadequate supervision and equipment.

Food-for-work programmes and feeding programmes formed the core of the Botswana government's response to drought – and thus, in practice, poverty – from 1966 onwards. They did leave a small gap, with "destitutes incapable of taking part in 'food for work' projects" being "provided for by other means".<sup>46</sup> It is unclear what numbers of people were provided for through these various

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<sup>42</sup> Khama, Presidential Address to BDP, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> Press release, Bechuanaland Protectorate Government (dated 27 July) (CO 1048/939).

<sup>44</sup> 'Interim Appraisal Report: Botswana 323' (WFP/IGC 12/6 Add. 69, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1967), Agenda Item 6, 12<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 5-14 October 1967.

<sup>45</sup> 'Interim Appraisal Report: Botswana 323' (WFP/IGC 12/6 Add. 69, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1967), Agenda Item 6, 12<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP IGC, Rome, 5-14 October 1967.

<sup>46</sup> Bechuanaland Protectorate Government, according to Telegram, High Commissioner to Colonial Office, 13 June 1966 (CO 1048/939, document 174).

programmes. The food-for-work programmes and feeding programmes reached a large proportion of the population through the second half of 1966 and into early 1967. The WFP-funded food-for-work programme (#323) was intended to reach 360,000 people – more than half of the population – through 60,000 workers. In practice, it reached about half of this number. The WFP-funded feeding programme (#324) also grew slowly. Nonetheless, these figures suggest that approximately one-third of the population was fed through drought relief during 1966-67.

## **The institutionalisation of relief programmes**

Employment on the food-for-work programme (WFP programme no. 323) never reached the target of 60,000. The maximum number of ‘volunteers’ at any one time had been about 34,000. Over the first six months of the project the average was just over 30,000, giving an estimated total of over 180,000 beneficiaries, or close to one-third of the population. Good rains in early 1967 meant that the demand for food and work dropped. In July 1967, the programme provided work and food for only 13,000 workers. In August, the number dropped to 7,400, and in September to 5,900, ‘as many workers left voluntarily to reap the good harvests’. The programme was shut down after 15 months in September 1967. Only 19,000 tons of food (just under one half of the approved amount) were distributed, at a total cost to the WFP of only \$2.5 million (i.e. less than half of the \$5.9 million that had been committed).<sup>47</sup> The cattle feed programme had already been terminated, early, in July 1967, after only one-third of the committed feed had been supplied.<sup>48</sup>

The children feeding programme, however, expanded steadily after a slow start. After two years it had reached only 32,000 primary school children (compared to the target of 72,000) and 11,000 pre-school children (compared to the target of 63,000).<sup>49</sup> The number of primary school children fed grew from 32,000 to 80,000 in early and mid-1968, passing the target of 72,000, and prompting the Government to apply to the WFP to raise the target to 92,000. The number of preschool children (and mothers) fed tripled in early 1968, to about 30,000, and the Government confidently predicted that the combined target of 107,000

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Terminal Report: Botswana 323’ (WFP/IGC 13/7 Add.35, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1968), Agenda Item 7, 13<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP IGC, Rome, 17-24 April 1968. See also Botswana (1968): 63.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Terminal Report: Botswana 340’ (WFP/IGC 13/7 Add.36, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1968), Agenda Item 7, 13<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP IGC, Rome, 17-24 April 1968.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Summary of revised official request: Botswana 324 (third revision)’ (WFP/IGC 14/9 Add.8), Agenda item no. 9, 14<sup>th</sup> Session of the IGC, 6-15 November 1968; ‘Project for IGC approval: Botswana 324 Exp.’ (WFP/IGC 19/6 Add.9, 10 February 1971), Agenda Item no.6, 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the IGC, 29 March – 7 April 1971.

would be met before the end of the first five years of the programme in 1971. The rations were increased, school feeding was extended to more days per annum, and the programme was extended to cover TB outpatients. These revisions increased to budget for the five-year programme by \$1 million, to a total of \$6.5 million.<sup>50</sup>

In practice, the food-for-work as well as the children feeding programmes continued and became institutionalised. In its initial application to the WFP for the food-for-work programme, the Bechuanaland Government had declared its hope that the development schemes would continue, albeit on a smaller scale and a 'self-help basis', even after the need for food aid ended.<sup>51</sup> It is not clear what did continue following the termination of WFP Programme 323 in late 1967, but only a few months later the Government applied to the WFP for a new 'emergency operation'. The improved rains in 1966-67 were not repeated in 1967-68. Cereal production was to remain low or very low until 1971, with food aid continuing to exceed local production (Cathie, 1991). In March 1968 the WFP approved the request to resume its food-for-aid programme in Botswana. The WFP's Emergency Operation 861 provided food-for-work for 10,000 workers, supporting a total of 60,000 people, for the ten months from April 1968 through February 1969, at a total cost of just under \$1 million. This was later extended for an additional three months, and then one further month, at an additional cost of almost \$400,000. Like the previous food-for-work programme, this entailed providing WFP food to work gangs moulding bricks and using these to build classrooms, houses for teachers and other officials. It also supplied food to Angolan refugees in north-west Botswana whilst they built houses and cleared fields.<sup>52</sup> The third WFP food-for-work programme (#564) followed immediately on from the second, in July 1969. Initially intended to last for just over one year, to August 1970, it was extended to May 1971. For most of the first year the programme employed about 20,000 workers, each supposedly supporting another five dependents. In the second year it was scaled down to about 10,000 workers.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> 'Summary of Revision Official Request: Botswana 324 revision' (WFP/IGC 10/2 Add.9, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1966), Agenda Item 11, 10<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP IGC, Rome, 31 Oct-9 Nov 1966.

<sup>51</sup> 'Community Development and Tsetse Fly Control: Summary of official request' (WFP/IGC 9/10 Add.17, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1966), Agenda item no.9, 9<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP IGC, Rome, 18-26 April 1966.

<sup>52</sup> 'Emergency Operations: Report by the Executive Director' (WFP/IGC 14/5 6 November 1968), Agenda item no, 5(a), 14<sup>th</sup> Session of the IGC, Rome, 11-16 November 1968; see also Stevens (1979): 104-5.

<sup>53</sup> 'Terminal Report: 564Q, Community Development in Drought-Stricken Areas' (WFP/IGC 26/11 Add.B5, August 1974), Agenda Item no. 11, 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the IGC, Rome, 24-30 October 1974.

Food production in Botswana improved from 1971 (Cathie, 1991), but there continued to be localised droughts. These included slight problems across most of the country in 1971 and 1973, and regional difficulties in the east in 1970/71, Ngamiland (in the north-west) in 1970, 1972/73, and perhaps Tsabong (in the south-west) in 1974 (Sandford, 1977: 28, B20-21). In May 1973, in the aftermath of poor rains, the Government applied again to the WFP for a fourth food-for-work programme. The WFP approved Emergency Operation 995 for six months, for 50,000 beneficiaries, at a cost to WFP of \$350,000.<sup>54</sup> Work was limited to brick-making and field-clearing, ‘in the belief that government technical supervision would be adequate for these tasks’. Despite the by-now extensive experience in running food-for-work programmes, this campaign also ran into organisational difficulties:

‘First, more people reported for work than had been anticipated. Each village was set a quota when the project was planned, but in almost all cases these were exceeded during the first half of the project period. This was partly owing to bad luck: estimating the number of people made destitute by drought is a hazardous affair, and the forecasts can be little more than “guesstimates”. However, the excess turnout was also partly due to the government’s own actions. When the project was planned, destitute families were categorised as:

- Class A – households with no visible means of support but able to provide an able-bodied worker aged 14-60 years;
- Class B – households with similar characteristics to Class A, but owning five or less small stock
- Class C – households qualifying for admission to Classes A and B but unable to supply an able-bodied worker aged 14-60 years.

The WFP assisted food for work project was designed to help Classes A and B who were assumed to be temporarily destitute as a result of the drought. It was not intended that Class C should be included for obvious reasons: destitute families with no able-bodied workers are unlikely to be able to participate in a programme of physical labour, and their destitution is unlikely to be a temporary consequence of the drought. In the event, however, no such programme materialised, and Class C destitutes tended to join the food for work projects’ (Stevens, 1979: 111-2).

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<sup>54</sup> ‘Emergency Operations: Report by the Executive Director’ (WFP/IGC 26/5-B, September 1974), Agenda Item 5 for the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the WFP IGC, Rome, 11-15 October 1965.

The campaign was ended when rains improved in late 1973 and into 1974, and participants left to plough their lands. Stevens assesses that “it would have been cheaper for the government to have handed out the food aid free of charge than it was to make people work for it” – although the programme might have succeeded in its goal of safeguarding the dignity of the destitute (Stevens, 1979: 112-3, 120-1).

Parts of the state sought to continue public employment programmes even after the threat of immediate drought had passed and WFP food supplies had come to an end. In 1974 the Department of Labour lobbied unsuccessfully for funds to continue to pay cash (rather than food) to the 10,000 workers on the food-for-work programme (Chambers, 1977: 2-3). The following year, however, following advice from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the government budgeted (through the fourth National Development Plan) more than 1 million Pula (i.e. more than 1 million Rand) for labour-intensive public works programmes for the three years 1978/79-1980/81 (see Botswana, 1975: 326-7). It also bought trucks for the distribution of WFP food. Even before drought recurred in 1978/79, the state had institutionalised food-for-work programmes.

By June 1970, the number of primary school children being fed rations (during school term) had reached 82,000, through 280 schools. Almost 50,000 pre-school children and 25,000 expectant and nursing mothers were fed, along with about 4,000 secondary school students, Youth Brigade trainees, refugee children and TB patients, giving a total of 161,000 beneficiaries (or one quarter of the total population).<sup>55</sup>

In 1971, following an evaluation, the WFP approved a five-year extension of the feeding programme, at a total cost to the WFP of almost \$9 million (almost £4 million). The number of schoolchildren to be fed was expected to rise to 94,000. The targets for the ‘vulnerable groups’ remained unchanged: 63,000 pre-school children, 9,000 pregnant women, 36,000 nursing mothers and 2,500 TB out-patients.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the WFP provided food for secondary between 9,000 and 14,000 secondary school students and Youth Brigade trainees under a separate programme.<sup>57</sup> By 1975, the feeding programme reached about 110,000 primary school students, in more than 300 schools, in addition to almost as many people in ‘vulnerable groups’, i.e. a total of almost one-third of the

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<sup>55</sup> WFP, ‘Interim Evaluation Report: Botswana 324’ (WFP/IGC 19/9 Add.28, 23 February 1971; Agenda Item no.9 for the 19<sup>th</sup> session of the IGC, Rome, 29 March – 7 April 1971).

<sup>56</sup> ‘Feeding for Primary School Children and Vulnerable Groups: Project for IGC Approval’ (Botswana 324 EXP) (WFP/IGC 19/6, Add.9, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1971), Agenda Item no.6, 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the IGC, Rome, 29<sup>th</sup> March – 7<sup>th</sup> April 1971.

<sup>57</sup> Under WFP programme 610, ‘Institutional Feeding’.

population.<sup>58</sup> In 1978 the WFP reported that the official statistics on the numbers of beneficiaries were suspect. According to these statistics, 143,000 primary school children, 102,000 pre-school children, 33,000 mothers and 4,000 TB patients benefitted. The actual numbers of regular beneficiaries was almost certainly lower than these.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the growth was clearly strong, and the WFP feeding programme was repeatedly extended. In 1979, the WFP anticipated that the anticipated numbers of school children supported would rise from 140,000 to 150,000 by 1982. The targets for other ‘vulnerable groups’ were set at 85,000 preschool children, 35,000 expectant and nursing mothers, and (over three years) 4,500 TB outpatients. More than 1,000 Youth Brigade trainees would also be fed, giving a total target of more than 270,000 individuals. The cost to the WFP would be more than \$22 million (about £11 million).<sup>60</sup> In the face of renewed drought, these targets were exceeded. By mid-1983, 199,000 school children were receiving midday meals, with many children in rural areas receiving food also over weekends and school holidays, and there were more than 300,000 ‘vulnerable group beneficiaries’. In total, about 50 percent of the population was being fed by the WFP through this programme.<sup>61</sup> The programme was later extended twice more.<sup>62</sup>

The food-for-work programmes together with the school and ‘vulnerable groups’ feeding programme did not reach all poor people. Some ‘destitute’ households lacked able-bodied adults who could be employed on food-for-work programmes (i.e. fell into ‘Class C’ in the typology discussed above) but could not survive on whatever food they received through school or vulnerable group feeding programmes. Botswana inherited an ad hoc system of destitute relief, without any statutory poor law. Although a new policy was repeatedly envisaged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, expenditures remained ad hoc and meagre. In 1972, the total expenditure on ‘destitutes’ by all of the district councils came to less than R10,000 – which was the equivalent of less than 2 percent of the budget for feeding programmes for ‘vulnerable groups’ (Stevens, 1978: 28). The result was pressure on district councils and development committees to include

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<sup>58</sup> WFP, ‘Interim Evaluation Report: Botswana 324 and Exp.’ (WFP/IGC 28/11 Add.4, August 1975; Agenda Item no.11 for the 28<sup>th</sup> session of the IGC, Rome, 29 September – 3 October 1975).

<sup>59</sup> WFP, ‘Interim Evaluation Report: Botswana 324 and Exp.’ (WFP/CFA 7/10 Add.4, March 1979; Agenda Item no.10 for the 7<sup>th</sup> session of the IGC, Rome, 14-25 May 1979).

<sup>60</sup> ‘Feeding for Primary School Children and Vulnerable Groups: Project for CFA Approval’ (Botswana 324 EXP II) (WFP/CFA 7/12 (WPME) Add.5, March 1979), Agenda Item no.12, 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the WFP Committee on Food and Policies and Programmes, Rome, 14-25 May 1979.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Interim Evaluation Summary Report: Feeding for Primary School Children and Vulnerable Groups’ (Botswana 324 EXP II) (WFP/CFA 17/6 Add.A8, Feb 1984), Agenda Item no.16, 17<sup>th</sup> Session of the CFA, Rome, 28 May – 8 June 1984.

<sup>62</sup> Under 324 EXP III (1984) and EXP IV (1990).

‘destitutes’ in food-for-work programmes (as we saw above) or find other money. In 1974 responsibility for poor relief was transferred to local government. The number of claimants was small compared to drought years, but was rising, without any corresponding increase in the resources available. At the same time as it requested funds to enable it to replace food rations with cash for 10,000 workers on food-for-work programmes (see above), The Department of Local Government asked for money to provide food to 3,000 destitute families. Neither proposal was raised funded. The government appears to have prioritised more ‘visible’ projects: roads, and classrooms and other buildings (Chambers, 1977: 2-3).

Almost continuously for the six years from early 1965 to early 1971 (and then again in late 1973 into early 1974) somewhere between 10 and 30 percent of the population were being fed through emergency food aid (in 1965-66) or food-for-work programmes (from 1966), mostly supplied by the WFP with substantial direct and indirect financial support from the British government. A study conducted in 1971/72 (with the assistance of the FAO) and published in 1974 found that more than one in three households (presumably in affected areas) had been involved in food-for-work programmes at some time. Most participants were women, and most were poor (Stevens, 1979: 192), making it “one of the very few programmes in Botswana” to reach the poor (Colclough & McCarthy, 1980: 133). In addition, the number of children (preschool and at school) and mothers being fed through feeding schemes rose steadily from about 43,000 in early 1968 to about 150,000 in the early 1970s, more than 200,000 by 1975, and about 250,000 individuals by the time that drought recurred in 1979 (after which the number rose rapidly). Throughout this period, in non-drought as well as drought years, a substantial proportion of the population was receiving WFP food. As Masire (2006: 79-80) recalled later, he “went to the World Food Programme to seek assistance, and as we faced periodic drought, it became an almost annual pilgrimage”.

This massive operation required institutional reform. Initially, in 1965, implementation was done on an ad hoc basis, with District Commissioners liaising with chiefs and headmen. Legislation in 1965 transferred legislative and executive powers from chiefs to elected District Councils. Thereafter, District Commissioners worked with the new Councils and especially with more local Village Development Committees (Munemo, 2012: 139-41). The food-for-work and children feeding programmes initiated in 1966 were initially administered by the Food Supply Branch of the Ministry of Home Affairs, under a Senior Administrative Officer who was directly responsible to the Prime Minister. At the local level, food under the food-for-work programme was distributed by local government officials together with Village Development Committees

(requiring, the WFP was told, an additional 150 clerks),<sup>63</sup> whilst the feeding programmes were run through schools and clinics.

In June 1970, in the face of administrative weaknesses within the Food Supply Branch, the Government established a dedicated Special Feeding and Famine Relief Unit within the Department of Local Government, with a head who was directly responsible to the Permanent Secretary in the Department.<sup>64</sup> For reasons that are unclear, the distribution of food was soon consolidated under a new Institutional Food Programme (IFP),<sup>65</sup> which was to manage the distribution of WFP food until May 1982, when it was replaced by a new Department of Food Resources. The IFP handled more than 32,000 tons of WFP food between 1971 and 1975 alone (Stevens, 1979: 41).

## Rethinking drought relief

Although good rains in the mid-1970s removed much of the pressure for drought relief, both the Botswana government and its international partners were conscious of the need to improve systems of provision. In late 1976, with funding from the British Government, a consultant (Stephen Sandford) was flown to Botswana to write a report on *Dealing with Drought*. Sandford considered the problems posed by drought to both human and cattle populations. He warned that the authorities should anticipate that drought would recur regularly, and urged that plans be drawn up in advance. He wondered how much of the human problem entailed insufficient production, and how much involved “a permanently destitute class of people whom drought tips over the edge into near-famine conditions because of its effect on their incomes rather than on their food supply” (Sandford, 1977: 56). The appropriate response was therefore to smooth incomes, not to smooth consumption (through the distribution of food). He acknowledged a debate over whether future famine relief should entail food-for-work or ‘free handouts’, but noted that organising public works programmes during droughts was difficult and that many poor (destitute) people (such as the elderly and women) might not be able to work for food (*ibid*: 60).

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Community Development and Tsetse Fly Control: Summary of official request’ (WFP/IGC 9/10 Add.17, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1966), Agenda item no.9, 9<sup>th</sup> session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Feeding for Primary School Children and Vulnerable Groups: Project for IGC Approval’ (Botswana 324 EXP) (WFP/IGC 19/6, Add.9, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1971), Agenda Item no.6, 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the IGC, Rome, 29<sup>th</sup> March – 7<sup>th</sup> April 1971.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Emergency Operations: Report by the Executive Director’ (WFP/IGC 26/5-B, September 1974), Agenda Item 5 for the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the WFP Intergovernmental Committee, Rome, 24-30 October 1974.

New research within Botswana was beginning to reveal the changing profile of poverty. Many men continued to work as migrant workers in South Africa. Whilst wages on South African mines rose significantly in the 1970s, and many migrants used the 'voluntary deferred pay' system to repatriate a portion of their earnings back to Botswana when they concluded their contracts, the resident working-age population in rural areas of Botswana was predominantly female and many households were in practice headed by women. At the same time, as research by Syson (1973) showed, marriage rates were falling and many – perhaps even most – young mothers were unmarried. Whilst many would marry later, many others would remain unmarried. Women-headed households generally owned fewer stock than male-headed households, and unmarried women tended to live in households that were less likely to plough land. Whereas most married women were supported primarily by their husbands, unmarried women depended on other kin. Almost one in six unmarried women depended *primarily* on WFP food rations (with a much smaller proportion pointing to the *Ipelegeng* food-for-work programme, which was in abeyance when most of the fieldwork was undertaken in 1971-72). Further research, some using data from subsequent national surveys, fuelled debate over the gendered character of poverty (Peters, 1983, 1984; Kerven, 1984; Izzard, 1985; see also Bruun, Mugabe & Coombes, 1994; O'Laughlin, 1998).

Developments elsewhere in the world also influenced thinking within the WFP and hence, indirectly, policy reform in Botswana. In 1973-75 the Sahel was beset by acute famine following six successive years of drought. Seven countries were affected. A three-year emergency relief operation supplied a total of 2.5 million tons of cereals to the region. Food, other basic supplies, and animal feed were delivered by one thousand trucks as well as in airlifts, airdrops and camel caravans into remote areas. Nonetheless, more than 100,000 people, and one million cattle, died. In 1973 drought beset Ethiopia also. In both cases, the WFP played a central role in monitoring and coordinating relief operations. The Ethiopian case provided a number of specific lessons: A National Drought Relief Committee was established early on. The emphasis of the operation switched from emergency relief to long-term rehabilitation, with food supplies increasingly being allocated to food-for-work programmes, for work including soil conservation, irrigation and reforestation projects. More generally, the 1973-75 crises pointed to the importance of early-warning systems, pre-drought preparation and improved relief coordination (Shaw, 2011: 54-6).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Many lessons from food relief operations in Botswana, the Sahel (Upper Volta) and elsewhere (Tunisia and Lesotho) were distilled in an important book by another researcher based at the Overseas Development Institute (and also funded by the British Ministry of Overseas Development), Christopher Stevens (Stevens, 1979).

In Botswana, food-for-work programmes were already central to drought relief, there was already some national coordination, and there had already been a partial shift from relief to proactive development (as we have seen above). The government of Botswana was already paying close attention to production. The government continued the policy of the late colonial state of drilling boreholes to improve water supplies in rural areas (see Peters, 1994; Carlson, 2003). Water was not only a critical material resource, but was also symbolically important, a ‘manifestation of the benign power of *goromente* (government)’ (Gulbrandsen, 2012: 200). These policies helped to insure some cattle farmers – mostly the richer ones – against drought. Many BDP leaders and senior bureaucrats had become large farmers. Improved revenues due to the growth of mining output at Orapa and Selebi-Phikwe meant that the state could invest also in the modernisation of agriculture and diversification in rural development. In 1972, the government proclaimed its commitment to more broad-based rural development in a Government Paper (Botswana, 1972), commissioned consultants from the Institute for Development Studies in the UK (headed by Robert Chambers), and published a second Government Paper summarising the government’s response to their recommendations (Botswana, 1973a; see also Botswana, 1973b). Late in 1973, the government approved an Accelerated Rural Development Programme (ARDP), which it implemented (in haste) between 1974 and 1976.

It was not clear that the poor benefitted from these policy reforms. A growing proportion of households had no cattle (Saugestad, 2001: 78; see also Colclough & McCarthy, 1980). Chambers was critical in his evaluation of the ARDP in 1976-77, arguing that infrastructure was only a beginning, and made little difference to the poor:

‘The issue now is one of imagination and political will to direct policy and the civil service towards ensuring that economic growth means better lives not just for those rural people who are more able to help themselves but specifically for those who are poorer, weaker, and less capable of taking advantage of opportunities; for those in short who tend to get left behind and left out’ (Chambers, 1977: 36).

In 1978 the government did initiate an Arable Land Development Programme (ALDEP) aimed at the 60-70,000 small farmers who ploughed less than 10 hectares, many of whom had too few cattle to plough and lacked labour also. ALDEP would effectively subsidise farmers’ adoption of new productivity-raising technologies, including donkey-ploughing and fencing, as well as through price stabilisation (Botswana, 1979, Part I: 6/26-6/31). Among the poorest people in Botswana were the San (‘Bushmen’). The government did initiate programmes aimed at the San: the Bushmen Development Programme

(1974-77), followed by the Remote Areas Development Programme, aimed at 60,000 'remote rural poor'. Scholars were generally sceptical about the design and effects of these programmes (e.g. Saugestad, 2001: 117-9).

The BDP government did invest heavily in education and health care. Financial support from several donors helped Botswana to extend its primary school system. Primary school fees were reduced, and Botswana achieved almost universal primary education. Investment was increasingly redirected to secondary schooling. Public health care had also been very limited in 1966: Botswana had "only eight small hospitals and perhaps two-dozen clinics and dispensaries" (Masire, 2006: 218). Slow improvements in public health services contributed to dramatic improvements in health outcomes. In 1973, the state began to emphasise primary health care clinics and posts, especially in rural areas (Colclough & McCarthy, 1980: 222-4).

In the mid and late 1970s the BDP government seems to have been lulled into complacency about the challenges of deep poverty. Mining was booming, and growing the economy. The government was expanding rapidly public education and investing in improved nutrition through its feeding programmes, which together helped to improve the opportunities for many younger Botswana to take advantage of economic growth. Agricultural policies aimed to improve production and ward off the risks of famine and cattle mortality. Food-for-work programmes ensured some opportunities for the poor, and the school and vulnerable groups feeding programmes helped to meet their most basic need. Despite good rains, however, destitution did not disappear. More importantly, drought would at some point recur, pushing again many poor households back into severe destitution.

In June 1978, in response to the Sandford Report, the government convened a symposium on drought (Hinchev, 1979). The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning commissioned a Drought Contingency Plan. Another report recommended advance planning, in part to ensure that healthy cattle could be sold in large numbers as soon as drought appears likely. The report suggested that, given that the high costs of drought, the government should incur regular expenditure to limit these costs. A permanent coordinating National Drought Relief Committee was established to ensure more rapid responses in the event of drought (McGowan & Associates, 1979). But the government was slow to prepare for the inevitable drought.

The rains due in late 1978 were disappointing. In January there were briefly good rains, but then no further rain. The result was that no crops were harvested in 1979 and the demand for labour collapsed in rural areas. The Government initially responded slowly, providing relief food far too late:

‘Government’s position seems to be that, at least to begin with, household response is likely to be adequate, and that for famine relief to be provided at this early stage would discourage some households from trying to help themselves, and so create a “welfare dependency”’ (Vierich & Sheppard, 1980: 68).

Despite discussion, the country still had no contingency plan, and ‘was ill-prepared to launch a nationwide relief programme’ (Gooch & Macdonald, 1981: 14). Elections, scheduled for October 1979, intensified the need for the BDP government to respond effectively to the drought.

The Government could, and did, draw on its experiences in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In April, a national Inter-Ministerial Drought Working Group had been established to monitor drought and co-ordinate responses (with the assistance later of separate dedicated committees. The drought was formally if belatedly acknowledged in May 1979, and the state (with the WFP) quickly mounted a large and ‘generally successful’ relief operation from June. Emergency water supplies were provided in ‘many villages’. Food aid to ‘vulnerable groups’ and food-for-work programmes for able-bodied adults were rapidly expanded, reaching about 530,000 people (*ibid*: 5), i.e. about 80 percent of the population. The government also initiated a programme to pay for elderly or weak cattle, which were then culled, with the meat distributed as food aid. District and Village Drought Committees were established to assist the District Councils and Commissioners at the local level (Munemo, 2012: 144-50).

The onset of drought was reflected in the new (fifth) National Development Plan for 1979-85, published in 1979. The Plan listed a long set of development projects to address drought (and a concurrent outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease) (see Table 1). The budget for 1979/80 alone would amount to close to 5 million Pula, i.e. more than 1 percent of GDP. The largest budget items were food supplies, boreholes and water supplies, seed, cattle trucks to distribute food. These expenditures dwarfed the budgets allocated to the ongoing Remote Area Dwellers Programme (primarily for San) and the new Labour-Intensive Public Works Programme (see Table 2).<sup>67</sup> The Labour-Intensive Public Works Programme, which had been proposed in the 1970s but was only implemented from 1982, represented the first attempt to institutionalise the public works

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<sup>67</sup> The 1979-85 National Development Plan (Botswana, 1979) sets out the capital and recurrent budgets for these two programmes. Over six years, the capital budgets for these programmes were 395,000 and 300,000 Pula respectively, giving a total over six years of about one-tenth of the emergency drought relief for one year; the reported recurrent budgets were tiny, at 8,000 and 15,000 Pula respectively, but I think that most of the recurrent cost entailed food provided by the WFP or other off-budget sources.

programme in non-drought years, reflecting the recognition (first made by Sandford) that destitution had become a chronic condition.

The drought pushed the government also to formalise its ‘destitutes’ policy, i.e. provision for adults who were unable to work on food-for-work programmes. Hitherto, this has been the responsibility of District Commissioners and later District Councils, who had to formulate and implement their own policies with very limited financial support from the central government. In November 1980, the government published a new National Destitutes Policy, that included guidelines for the district-level Social Welfare Officers charged with implementing it. Individuals could be registered as destitute if they had neither assets (i.e. land, cash, livestock) nor kin and were “incapable of working” or had been “rendered helpless due to natural disaster or temporary hardship”. Food rations were modest. It seems that the new policy formalised what the government had in fact implemented in response to the drought of 1978-79. Critics reported that able-bodied adults had received destitute relief (presumably because they had been ‘rendered helpless’ by the drought).

‘The 1979/80 relief programme revealed that free food distribution encouraged a sense of dependency, was damaging to individual self-respect and human dignity, and possibly contributed to reduced agricultural production. Furthermore, attempts to select beneficiaries for relief food were extremely unpopular and very difficult to achieve’ (Gooch & Macdonald, 1981: 120).

Notwithstanding Sandford’s report, benefits were provided in kind, with rations of food and other essential goods. Benefits were set at explicitly ‘minimum’ levels, and were discretionary, following an assessment by a social worker and registration as ‘destitute’. Only one person per household was eligible (except for very large households).

In addition to moving towards a formal policy on destitutes, the distribution of food to ‘vulnerable groups’ was formalised as the Supplementary Feeding Programme (and later still evolved into what was called the Vulnerable Group Feeding Programme), run through the Ministry of Local Government (Munemo, 2012: 142). Primary school fees were also abolished in 1980. Improved and planned food-for-work programmes became an integral component of Botswana’s nascent welfare state, through the Labour-Based Drought Relief Programme. In all cases, funds and food were controlled through central government.

In the aftermath of the drought, the new Destitutes Policy was severely criticised. In a report for the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning,

Gooch & Macdonald urged that able-bodied adults should not be permitted to register as destitute. Instead, they should be required to work on relief work programmes. These should be self-targeted, meaning that they should pay a wage (of only 1 Pula/day) that “was low enough to discourage those who had alternative means of support from coming forward, while enabling those affected by the drought to survive”. The wage should certainly not be higher than the prevailing wage for unskilled labour in normal years. Gooch & Macdonald did recommend paying cash (rather than in kind), and found that the rations set out in the Destitute Policy were “insufficient for a working adult” (1981: 126-9). They recommended increased food rations to ‘vulnerable groups’, and out-of-term feeding for primary school children, large-scale relief works in all drought-affected villages, the expansion of the District Councils’ destitute programmes, and the provision of family rations to families in remote areas without access to clinics or relief works (*ibid*: 10-12). They also criticised severely the efficacy of the Institutional Food Programme, whose performance was found to have been ‘lamentable’ (*ibid*: 133). They recommended more devolution to District Councils, together with improved monitoring, contingency planning and general organisation.

These were substantive criticisms, but their import was to modify rather than transform the design of public policy. The drought of 1978-79 certainly pushed the government of Botswana to institutionalise the remaining components of the country’s subsequent welfare, as Munemo (2012) emphasises, but the components had been pioneered and developed over the previous fifteen years. School children were fed routinely. Designated vulnerable groups were fed during periods of drought. Able-bodied adults were employed on food-for-work public works programmes. ‘Destitutes’ received modest food rations. A national inter-ministerial committee provided essential monitoring and co-ordination. Small farmers were the focus of agricultural extension efforts, and a dedicated programme addressed the challenges posed by the ‘remote’ (mostly Bushmen) poor. These public programmes were parsimonious: They staved off severe malnutrition but they did little to reduce either poverty or inequality. But they represented an important shift in the role and responsibilities of the state, a shift that was to lead to the elaboration of a more orthodox, if still conservative, welfare state in the 1990s and 2000s.

## **Conclusion**

The drought relief programme mounted in Botswana in the early 1980s has been widely cited as either an exemplary response to drought or the basis of the country’s conservative welfare state. The key features of the 1980s drought relief programme were, however, developed over the preceding fifteen years,

initially in response to the deepening drought of the early 1960s that enveloped Botswana at the time of independence, then through the difficult years of the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, and even into the late 1970s despite improved rains. When drought recurred in 1978/79, the foundations of an effective relief programme were already in place.

The scale of these drought relief programmes was enormous. Contemporary commentators (with varied interests) and later scholars differ in their estimates of precisely how many people were fed at what times. Khama himself told Parliament in April 1966 that the number of ‘destitutes’ receiving food had risen to 114,000, and was expected to rise to “well over half the population ... before the next rainy season”. Sandford (1977: 1) reported that one-quarter of the population had been fed, whilst Colclough and McCarthy (1980: 54) reported one-fifth. Picard (1987) gave the highest estimate, at two-thirds of the population receiving food aid. Samatar (1999: 63) cites a contemporary source that puts the proportion at one-third.

Some of this confusion reflects the figures presented to the WFP in applications for food, and then by the WFP in their estimates of the costs of meeting these requests. Many of these figures proved to be exaggerated. The first formal food-for-work programme (WFP programme 323), for example, anticipated employing 60,000 adults ensuring a total of about 360,000 beneficiaries. But the actual average employment over the first six months was only about 30,000. On other occasions, the WFP’s estimates were exceeded, as in the late 1970s when the rapid expansion of public education meant that the school feeding programme expanded faster than anticipated. The reported data on actual disbursements of food suggest that the number of Botswana being fed rose rapidly to more than 100,000 during 1965 and (indirectly as well as directly) close to 200,000 during 1966, before dropping sharply during 1967. In 1968 and 1969 the number rose again, again reaching close to 200,000 people (though both food-for-work and school feeding programmes). In the early 1970s the number drop by a little, but the growth of the school and ‘vulnerable group’ feeding programmes more than offset the absence of food-for-work. The 1973-74 food-for-work programme pushed the total number above 200,000. The food-for-work programme ended in 1974, but the continued expansion of the school and ‘vulnerable group’ feeding programmes reached about 220,000 people by 1975, and 250,000 by 1979. These feeding programmes combined with a massive drought relief effort reportedly reached a total of 530,000 people, in 1979-80. What this means is that the number of Botswana being fed rarely dropped below one-fifth of the population, was more often one-third, but did not reach one half until 1979-80.

The cost was substantial. Much of this cost was borne by the WFP. The cost in 1966 of the WFP's development and emergency programmes (including stockfeed) were the equivalent of about 2 percent of the GDP of Bechuanaland (Stevens, 1978). WFP programmes cost an average of about 1% of GDP each year over ten years. Over the ten years to 1975, the WFP spent a total of \$26 million, of which about \$20 million was spent on food, and the remainder on infrastructural and administrative costs. Botswana received more WFP food aid per capita than any other country (Stevens, 1978). In the mid and late 1960s substantial costs were borne by the British, either directly (through dedicated expenditures) or indirectly (through general budget support to the Government of Botswana, which bore some of the cost). In the 1970s, domestic revenues raised within Botswana (increasingly from mining revenues) covered a rising share of the costs. When drought recurred in 1979, the Government budgeted almost 5 million Pula in emergency relief, under the National Development Plan. It is likely that the cost of relief between 1965 and 1979 varied between 1 and 2 percent of GDP. The cost was not higher because the benefits – i.e. the food rations – were parsimonious.

The Botswana 'relief' programmes were unusual solely on account of their character as well as their scale and duration. First, they were programmatic, albeit of a conservative nature providing benefits that were in kind (although there was some consideration of cash benefits in the 1970s) and parsimonious. They quickly evolved into three distinct programmes: food-for-work for the able-bodied (and their dependents), school feeding programmes, and the clinic-based 'vulnerable groups' feeding programme. Between them they covered most, but not all of the poor. Adult 'destitutes' who were unable to work, for whatever reason, posed a chronic challenge. The design of public policy assumed that the elderly, infirm and disabled were supported by working kin. This assumption became less and less credible, placing a strain on food-for-work programmes (as became clear in 1974-74). In 1980 the government formalised its Destitutes Policy, but the problem persisted, providing impetus to the introduction of old-age pensions in the 1990s. The small number of San remained discriminated against or even excluded from most of these programmes.

The programmes were programmatic in a second sense, in that they were administered by a bureaucracy rather than as benefits at the discretion of chiefs or politicians. Seretse Khama himself had succeeded his grandfather and father as chief of the Bangwato at the age of four, with his uncle (Tshekedi Khama) serving as regent. After he married a British woman in 1948, the British Government exiled him to London and only allowed him to return to Bechuanaland in 1956 when he renounced the chieftaincy. Khama retained enormous legitimacy, especially among the Bangwato, but (with Masire) built

the BDP as a modernising party that was not only independent of the chiefs but also limited their role in government. Indeed, some chiefs played prominent roles in opposition parties (Tlou, Parsons & Henderson, 1995). Drought relief was administered by dedicated national and local bureaucracies, the latter working with Village Development Committees. In practice, the BDP used relief programmes to shore up its rural support base, but its patronage system was institutionalised rather than personalistic.

By the time of independence (in late 1966), public policy in Botswana was distinctive. Contrary to Vaughan's Africa-wide assessment, almost all Batswana (with the possible exception of the San) could count on the state supporting them in times of need, even if that support was very modest. This support was quickly institutionalised. Botswana was a pioneer within Africa in part because of the environmental and economic conditions. The arid environment exposed Botswana to drought more often and more deeply than most other Southern African countries. Economically, by the 1960s, drought generated famine because there were insufficient employment opportunities. It was in the 1970s that large-scale, open unemployment became evident across the border in South Africa (Seekings & Natrass, 2005). Whilst rapid economic growth in Botswana mitigated this, it is likely that unemployment became significant in Botswana at much the same time.

Botswana was distinctive for political reasons also. The BDP was committed to modernisation, but also held onto a conservative ideology of social harmony and justice. The coincidence of drought, enduring poverty and rising prosperity served to frame the development of the BDP's distinctive ideology (Seekings, 2016b). Like many of their contemporaries in post-colonial Africa, Khama and Masire were preoccupied primarily with decolonisation, nation- and state-building. Khama and Masire staked out a strong position on the abolition of racial discrimination and the appointment of Batswana to positions in government. They were also repeatedly distracted by the immense challenges of being on the apartheid frontline. But drought compelled them to confront issues of poverty, whilst social and economic change forced them to consider what kind of a society they hoped Botswana would become. Under Khama's leadership, the BDP elaborated an ideology of social justice built around a doctrine of parsimonious but extensive welfare provision. They articulated the ideal of a harmonious society, in which education and agricultural extension provided the poor with opportunities to improve their lives, the poor had to contribute to self-help, and the state assisted them (modestly) if they faltered through no fault of their own. Public and individual responsibilities would thus be balanced. This idealised society was not egalitarian, but inequalities should not lead to conflict. This ideology was explicitly rooted in Setswana concepts, especially *kagisano*, meaning harmony and well-being, but had much in

common with the kinds of progressive conservatism associated with ‘one nation’ in Britain and Christian democrats in continental Europe.

“A lean cow cannot climb out of the mud, but a good cattleman does not leave it to perish”, proclaimed a Tswana proverb quoted by Khama in 1974, summarising his political philosophy. Mud, however, was not the usual problem in Botswana. The Khama presidency was bookended by very severe drought, that not only resulted in negligible harvests but also decimated cattle herds (especially in the smaller herds owned by small farmers). The experience of drought shaped the doctrine of benign conservatism developed by Khama, Masire and the BDP. Affecting the whole of society – including the owners of large cattle herds – drought required state action, at a time when scarce public resources necessitated also ‘self-help’. It especially threatened rural society, exposing not only the limits to an agrarian model for society but also the failures of the market. It encouraged policy-makers to worry about – and ‘modernise’ – agricultural production and productivity, but neither new techniques nor ‘villagisation’ nor even boreholes would prevent drought in future, which meant that this was an impetus to welfare state-building and not just ‘development’. As in the USA, drought was a natural disaster, and the ensuing famine and hardship could not be blamed on the poor themselves.

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## Appendix 1: WFP programmes in Botswana, 1965-1980

No.	Programme (and type)	Approved	Cost	Duration
824	Emergency Operation (food relief)	May, July, October and December 1965	\$3.4m (increased from initial \$0.4m)	12 months: July 1965 – June 1966
323	Community Development and Tsetse Fly Control (food-for-work)	April 1966	\$5.9m	15 months: July 1966 – Sep 1967
324	Supplementary feeding programme for school-children, mothers and pre-school children	April 1966, with three subsequent amendments	\$6.5m (increased from initial \$5.5m)	5 years, extended to a sixth year: June 1966 - June 1972
340	Livestock feeding scheme	April 1966, extended	\$1.2m committed	5 months, extended to 1 year: July 1966 - July 1967
861	Emergency Operation: Aid to drought (food-for-work)	25 March 1968; extended 7 Feb 1969; later extended again	< \$1m (initially) plus \$0.4m (extension)	10 months, extended by a further 3, then extended by 1 more: April 1968 - June 1969
564	Community Development in Drought-Stricken Areas (food-for-work)	June 1969	\$1.5m	July 1969 to August 1970
564 EX P	Community Development ... (food-for-work)	Sep 1970	\$0.9m	Sep 1970 to May 1971
324 EX P	Supplementary feeding programme ...	April 1971; later extended twice	\$21.3m (up from initial \$8.8m)	5 years from July 1972, extended by 2 years,

				extended by another 6 months, to Dec 1979
610	Institutional Feeding (secondary schools, Youth Brigades)	April 1970	\$1.1m	5 years: June 1971 to March 1976
207 4Q	Agricultural Improvement for Small Farmers Threatened by Drought	Feb 1973	Very small, and only one-third was spent	Nov 1973 to Mar 1974
995	Emergency Operation (food-for-work)	August 1973	\$0.35	6 months: Oct 1973 to March 1974
247 8Q	Assistance to Refugees	Sep 1978	\$3.5m	6 years from Jan 1979
324 EX P II	Supplementary feeding programme ...	May 1979	\$42.5m (up from initial \$22.4m)	Initially 3 years from Jan 1980; extended to 5 years, ending Dec 1984

*Note: The dollar/pound exchange rate was stable at \$2.8: £1 until the end of 1967, and at \$2.4: £1 until 1972. During the 1970s it rose and fell, averaging about \$2: £1.*

## Appendix 2:

*Table 1: Budget for emergency drought relief (and relief of foot-and-mouth disease)*

Project	Budget (000 Pula)		Description
	1979/80	1980/81	
DR 01	350		Boreholes, water, kraals etc
DR 02	450		Cattle trucks to be used for drought relief (NW)
DR 11	295		Diesel fuel subsidy for boreholes
DR 12	100		Purchase of old and weak cattle in Ngamiland (NW), at P50/beast, meat to go to feeding programmes: 1 beast/village and 1/school per week; target = 2000 cattle
DR 13	9.5		F&MD: buffalo fence in Ngamiland (NW)
DR 14	12.6		Labour-intensive firebreak clearance
DR 16	100		Irrigation and flood-control in NW
DR 17	270		Labour-intensive destumping in NW
DR 18	25		Water supplies in NW
DR 05	174		Botulism vaccines to reduce drought-related cattle mortality
DR 04	586		Emergency seed supply
DR 19	31.6		Labour-intensive work in game reserves in NW
DR 15	119.7		Employment to hunt game in NW; also to supply meat to drought-affected populations
DR 03	250	217	Trucks etc to deliver food aid
DR 20	100	57	LIPW projects in NW
DR 21	57		LIPW projects in Central District
DR 09	1000	1217	Food supplies and some cash relief
DR 08	600	702	Boreholes (including minor recurrent expenditure)
DR 22	115		Grants to schools in NW etc, in compensation for fees, cancelled for 1979 by presidential directive

*Note: These are in addition to relatively modest multi-year allocations to regular budget line items including Labour-Intensive Public Works (LG 38) and Remote Area Dwellers Programme (LG 32), both operated by the Ministry of Local Government (see Table 2).*

*NW is North-West (region).*

*Source: NDP 1979-1985, Part II.*

Table 2

Year	LIPW Scheme (LG 38)		Remote Area Dwellers Prog (LG 32)	
	Capital expenditure (000 Pula)	Recurrent expenditure (000 Pula)	Capital expenditure (000 Pula)	Recurrent expenditure (000 Pula)
1979/80	20	-	20	1
1980/81	40	2	40	2
1981/82	65	2	60	3
1982/83	90	2	60	3
1983/84	90	2	60	3
1984/85	90	-	60	3
Total (6 years)	395	8	300	15

*Note: Emergency drought relief = sum of items in Table 1 above.*

*Source: NDP 1979-1985, Part II.*