

Family Strengths Perspectives from Botswana

Lois R. Mberengwa

SUMMARY. This article discusses the challenges faced by most families in Botswana and the familial and social nets these families rely on to overcome the challenges. Both primary and secondary data were used to gather information. In-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of various tribes to get their perspective on the topic. HIV/AIDS was found to be at the centre of all social, economic, moral, spiritual, and emotional interaction among family members. Its impact is challenging traditional thinking about family structures and family life and necessitating their redefinition.

KEYWORDS. Botswanan family, family challenges, family strengths, HIV/AIDS impact traditional values

INTRODUCTION

Botswana is located in Sub-Saharan Africa. With a third of her population infected with HIV/AIDS, relatively high unemployment and poverty levels, a weakly diversified economy but having one of the largest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates, and a thriving multi-party democracy, families in Botswana are caught at the crossroads. They have to make critical decisions regarding their daily upkeep, their health, member roles, marriages and relationships. Often times this is a challenging task given the complex socio-environmental conditions under which they live. This chapter, therefore, first presents a profile of Botswana, and then discusses socio-environmental challenges faced by most families in Botswana and the familial and social nets these families rely on to overcome the challenges.

Both primary and secondary data sources are used. To get a clear perspective on challenges confronting today's families in Botswana and strategies they employ in an attempt to redress the challenges, in-depth interviews were conducted with four men and seven women representing the Mokgatla, Molete, Morolong, Mongwaketse, Mongwato, Mokalanga and Moyei tribes. Five had been married for more than ten years, four married between three and seven years, three were single without children, one was newly married, and one was single. They were asked for their opinions regarding issues about marriage and divorce, sex and sexual behaviors, domestic violence and abuse, politics, and economic conditions of their families in particular and those of Botswana in general. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes and workplaces. They were tape recorded to make it easier to capture most of their narratives and later transcribed.

BOTSWANA: THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE

Botswana is a land-locked country whose neighbors are Zambia and Zimbabwe to the northeast, Namibia to the north and west, and South Africa to the south and southeast. Botswana's total area is equivalent to the size of France or Kenya. Most of the terrain (84%) is covered by the Kalahari Desert. The only permanent source of water is the Okavango River which flows from the north, forming the world's largest inland delta system, which is approximately the size of Israel. The capital city is Gaborone.

Only two settlements have town/city status while the rest are referred to as villages, with the big villages having achieved urban status in 1991 (Gaisie & Majelantle, 1999). Today, 54% of the population lives in these urban centers, leaving an estimated 46% who live in the rural areas (Department of Population Studies, 2005). The majority, out of a total population of 1.8 million, live along the eastern high veld which is wetter and has a more varied relief.

Various tribes are found in Botswana and these include the San (popularly known as the Bushmen), the Bangwato, Bakwena, Bakhurutshe, Bangwaketse, Bakgatla, Batlaping, Bakalanga, Barolong, Bayei, and Batawana among others (Culture and History, 2001). Botswana is, therefore, a country of so many diverse cultures, yet all are united as Batswana (agriculturalists) and speak one major language, namely Setswana. Further, the people practice diverse religions which include Christianity and traditional religious belief systems.

Mining is at the heart of Botswana's economy, making Botswana the world's largest producer of gem diamonds in the world. As such, it boasts of an impressive economic record, with growth rates averaging 13% between 1970 and 1990 (Trading and Investment, 2001). Botswana is also a relatively peaceful and politically stable country. Tourism supplements Botswana's income, contributing about 12% of its GDP. Livestock production also thrives in the rural areas and remains a social and cultural touchstone (Wikipedia, 2006). Due to the arid and poor soil conditions, Botswana remains a large importer of most of its foodstuffs, with South Africa supplying the majority of the food. As we will see later in this chapter, farming activities are under threat due to changing sociocultural conditions, including increased migration to towns.

Socio-Environmental Challenges Faced by Families

The case of Botswana presented above is special. In about 40 years, Botswana has transformed from being one of the seven poorest nations at independence in 1966 to almost achieving developed country status in the year 2004. This rapid growth has its pros and cons. While the majority of the population might be seen to be moving with the tide and enjoying the economic benefits of development, it is likely that a significant portion of the population will be left out. This then presents a challenge to the government to make sure that every citizen of Botswana benefits and enjoys the fruits of development the country is experiencing. Issues such as homelessness, when people migrate from rural areas to cities, and an increased crime rate often accompany development in

many areas of the world. In the process, some people become impoverished in various ways. Some lose touch with families back home. Dialogue and exchange of views among family members is reduced, and some lack access to information that will enable them to make critical decisions as they make this transition.

Similarly, in this fast-paced economy, people experience new forms and levels of social interaction that are a blend of both the old and new life-ways. One woman reported, "Long back people tried to live a Christian life. Life now is fast. We used to help each other but now you can't even be given a cup of tea." Another added, "Life is hard, but it's not hard, it is us who are hard," implying that people had now been transformed into different kinds of human beings. The essential value of *sharing* has thus been challenged as Botswana continues to develop into a modern society. Traditional African family life thrived on the extended family. One could always count on this family for support when in need. Today's trends show preference for the nuclear family. The importance of family is highlighted by Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) (1997), and clearly expressed by one man I interviewed who observed that, "If you don't have family you are just like nothing. You can't progress without family [of your own]. You can't do anything when you are alone. You need to have family. My wife acts as an advisor . . . We advise each other. It helps us a lot." This kind of companionship or comradeship between two intimately-related people is a necessary ingredient for strong families.

The Challenge of HIV/AIDS

With a prevalence rate of 37.3%, Botswana is the second highest country in the world with people living with HIV (Fredriksson-Bass & Kanabus, (2004). HIV/AIDS has reduced the life expectancy rate to a low 39 years compared to 74.4 years before its advent in the mid-1980s (Virtual Institute for Higher Education in Africa (VIHEAF), (2005). Oftentimes, local media reports present this situation as a "pandemic," as a "national crisis" and as a "disaster." One man reckoned, "There is just too much disease today." Table 1 shows the severity of the problem of HIV/AIDS in Botswana and her neighbors. The diminishing life expectancies displayed in the table are shocking, with Botswana's projected at 26.7 years in 2010. It is hard to imagine a future generation with no elderly people if the present trend were to continue. Today, increased inter-marriage between people from different countries, regional trade, and the general movement of people all challenge prevention

TABLE 1. Average life expectancy in Botswana and its neighbors (age in years).

Country	Before AIDS	2010
Angola	41.3	35.0
Botswana	74.4	26.7
Namibia	68.8	33.8
South Africa	68.5	36.5
Zambia	68.6	34.4
Zimbabwe	71.4	34.6

Source: Virtual Institute for Higher Education In Africa (VIHEAF), Harare, Zimbabwe. Retrieved on November, 2005, from <http://www.viheaf.net/VIHEAF-Lesson9.htm>

strategies that need to be adopted in the Southern African region as a whole. AIDS knows no boundaries as the virus can easily filter through countries' borders. A combined strategy that equips citizens with the knowledge and skills to prevent the spread of HIV is crucial. This can be possible if people are more caring.

In discussions, interviewees linked AIDS to sex, behavior, drugs, and alcohol. When probed to explain the relationship among these elements they offered the following responses:

The real problem is that people tend to change their behavior after taking drugs and alcohol. . . . AIDS is caused by uncontrolled sexual behavior and alcoholism.

Drinking patterns have changed such that even the youth (15 year olds) are drinking too much.

Everyone in Botswana is drinking, even the women.

People are just involved in sex in and outside marriage. People no longer reserve sex to marriage; they just have it anytime with anyone they feel like.

Sex used to be reserved for only married people. But now everyone is involved in sex irrespective of status. . . . Some even marry at this young age.

Sex, behavior and HIV go hand in hand.

Sex contributes to breaking up of families. If one's partner does not want to have sex, then the other one starts looking elsewhere.

Youth drop out in school and they have children when they are young.

Behavior contributes to sexual problems and this depends on the individual.

HIV and AIDS is out of control, even the elders are being affected.

It appears a sexual revolution (Ericksen, 2003) has happened in Botswana. An early sexual debut is common among both boys and girls and they do so without much thought. They want to experiment with sex for the fun of it. One of the women remarked that, "Girls start having sex from as early as 15 years of age, when they are still babies themselves and they do not know what they are doing." The question then to ask is: Do these young people know what they are doing? Are they not scared of contracting AIDS? Where are the parents when such things happen? Do they allow such behavior among their children? This chapter attempts to answer some of these questions.

The president of the Republic of Botswana, Mr. Festus Mogae, in his foreword to the Botswana 2003 Second Generation HIV/AIDS Surveillance (2003) observes that, "For Botswana, factors that drive the epidemic are multiple, intertwined and complex and these have social-cultural and economic antecedents" (p. 1). In other words, HIV/AIDS knows no boundaries. It cuts across the social, economic, moral or spiritual, political and emotional spheres of life.

It was encouraging to note that all interviewees recognized that HIV/AIDS is a deadly disease and that action is needed to contain its spread. The Botswana National Policy on HIV/AIDS (1998) confirms this increase in knowledge among the populace by stating that, "In 1993, more than 90% of interviewed youths had correct knowledge about HIV transmission; between 80% and 50% correctly stated two methods of prevention and 50% to 60% used condoms consistently with 90% casual sexual partners" (p. 2). Such increase is attributed to government's "political and economic commitment to [HIV/AIDS] control by declaring war against it." One man offered the strategy for action by saying, "It's all about self behavior, if you don't change your lifestyle we are going to perish . . . There is a thing like self-respect; most don't respect themselves; so you have to first give yourself respect and then give other people respect." This man's response mirrors prevention strategies that have been adopted by both the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other private organizations, that focus on people either as individuals or as family units taking action to combat the disease mostly through behavior change. Mogae

(2003) recognizes partnerships between the private sector and civil societies, including people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA) organizations, joining together in fighting the pandemic. Current trends, however, show that despite the increase in knowledge about the disease, the disease continues to spread and its impact continues to be felt among families and communities.

Prevention strategies are now encouraging people to take personal responsibility for HIV/AIDS. Everyone should now ask the critical question: "What should I do to stop AIDS?" The 15-to-40 age group that is most sexually active and thus affected, often adopts a carefree attitude—not caring whether they get the disease or not, and not caring about the possibility that they can pass it on to the next person. This attitude needs to stop and they should think more critically about the consequences of AIDS to future generations and the country. HIV/AIDS activists should move beyond mere calls for awareness to the implementation of more dynamic strategies. For example, according to the BBC World (November, 2005) the Ugandan government now offers scholarships to girls who are still virgins on completion of high school to go to university and other tertiary education systems. This is an incentive to stop girls from indulging in sex prematurely. The issue of abstinence as a cultural strength in bringing behavior change will be explored further in the chapter.

The Challenge of Marriage

Next to HIV and AIDS, keeping the family intact (together) is increasingly becoming a big social concern in Botswana. One man described the issue of marriage as a "big challenge in itself. . . . There are so many problems with marriages, they do not last."

The Botswana Gazette (2005), a local weekly newspaper, notes that, "the rising number of divorce cases threaten the institution of marriage in the country" (p. 5). A total of 279 divorce cases were recorded in the first five months of the year 2005 in the country's two high courts. Most of these were attributed to domestic violence. Interviewees revealed the following reasons why "families are falling apart" in Botswana:

- The youth tend to marry early and most of these marriages end up in divorce.
- Divorce is caused by competition, human rights, and gender equality.

- Families are breaking up because of material things we are running after.
- A lot of people are not married hence they do not respect our marriage.
- Some marriages are not genuine; some women consider other things like money and leisure.
- People are no longer interested in marriage, even those that are in it are struggling to sustain it.
- In-laws also interfere in marriages and contribute to divorce.
- Adultery.
- Poor communication among couples.
- Women being exposed to alternative means of help and empowerment strategies.
- Behavior contributes to divorce.
- People are no longer valuing marriage, hence they can easily divorce.

If the above causes of divorce are analyzed, it would be found that they touch across economic and social relationships, familial obligations, values, and empowerment concerns. The issue of couples divorcing does not just affect the couple concerned, but its consequences also extend to those other members who live in close proximity to them, often shaking the social fabric that bound the couple together in the first place. In a divorce, relationships become strained. Children, if any, become perplexed as they do not know whether to side with the father or mother.

Traditionally, marriage is the social institution that permitted procreation to take place. Children born out of wedlock were often labeled social outcasts and mocked. In Botswana, however, it appears that single parenting is becoming more and more common. It has been observed that most Botswana do not marry during their life span, particularly females. Gaisie and Majelantle's (1999) study revealed that the tendency to remain single throughout one's life is much more pronounced among females than males. In their study, almost 29% (28.7%) of females aged 35-44 and 21.32% of those aged 45-54 had never married, compared to 25.21% and 13.74% among men, respectively. In addition, *Botswana Television* (2005) reports that 80% of those who went for the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Treatment (PMTCT) program (a program for pregnant mothers who have tested positive), were not married and that 40% of children under 14 did not know their father's identity. While these statistics might initially be quite shocking, one does not help but ask the reasons for such an increase in single parenting and

female-headed households. Is single parenting now the “preferred” family type in Botswana—whether it is by choice or otherwise?

Other equally interesting evolving trends related to marriage that impact family life in Botswana include the facts that: cohabitation and/or visiting unions are becoming increasingly significant; and the tendency to remain married during one’s lifetime is greater among males than females, particularly after 45 years (Gaisie & Majelantle, 1999). Such trends impact family forms and interactions, family cohesion, and the nature of relationships. In studying family strengths, there is a need to reflect on these evolving family forms and try to establish how societal attitudes toward them have been affected. It is a fact that single-parenting has already made its impact in Botswana’s demographics and people are caught up in a complex web between accepting the new and hanging on to the past.

The Challenge of Domestic Violence, Spousal and Child Abuse

Person-to-person violence is increasingly growing into a cancer in Botswana society. Reports of child abuse and “passion killings” (a phenomenon where one person first kills his lover and then kills himself) are frequently reported in the media. For example, front page news in *The Midweek Sun* (October 12, 2005) read: “Love crisis: Beware the man you sleep with may be your killer” (p. 1). In this report, 62 people were reported to have died in passion killings since January, 2005. Fifty-six murders had been recorded the previous year in 2004. Trying to understand the causes of passion killings (or “craze” as it is referred in the paper) is equally puzzling. One man observed that, “People are led into relationships that are not genuine by sexual behavior and other sources of entertainment and they end up being frustrated and start to fight and abuse one another.” When the relationship goes wrong, the couple starts fighting because they do not know how to handle the situation. Other views expressed were that:

- Men don’t want to accept that they are guilty (wrong) and it is often the man who attacks the woman and then kills himself.
- Sometimes these are caused by people having too many rights which was not the case in the past.
- Child abuse is now common. The existence of stepchildren is fueling child abuse.
- Sometimes children are being abused because they are now staying with relatives rather than their own biological parents.

- Over consumption of this beverage [alcohol] is common, not only among men but also women. Men, when distressed, often take solace in the bottle and when they return home, take it out on the wives and children.
- Some men can't control themselves when intoxicated.
- Long back husband and wife respected each other and there were fewer misunderstandings.

According to *The Midweek Sun* (October 12, 2004) "the unprecedented social changes that have occurred in the last 40 years which have complicated life, especially for men" are the causes of passion killings. In addition, "Due to the culture of patriarchal upbringing some men who still believe that they can determine the initiation and termination of a relationship may end up killing when they feel used and jilted." Unfortunately, the situation of passion killings was "reaching psycho-contagious proportions where people are now idolizing and copying what other killers are doing" (p. 3), and this signaled societal moral decay. Headlines such as, "Man (42) rapes four-year-old" (*Echo*, 2005, p. 7) surely challenge people's thinking about such trends. One is bound to ask what is happening to our society. What has gone wrong? What has happened to those social safety nets that would protect our children? It seems people no longer value the sanctity of life. Traditionally, the care and socialization of a child was entrusted to the whole village and no one would harm a child because their welfare was everybody's concern. Today it is different. Neighbors, uncles, or even fathers are reported to be sexually abusing children. The issue of passion killings and other forms of violence in Botswana requires individual, familial, communal, and national commitment to those values that made our forefathers teach us to say, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Challenges of Family Roles

Botswana's economy is traditionally built on subsistence farming and a communal way of life. The people interviewed kept referring to the "good old times" when they used to plough. "My mother would be here with us. Husband used to go and look for a job and send us money. Everything was for the family. Today it is more of "I want to have my own things. He wants to have his own. I will sell my own cattle [cows]. . . ." Women used to not work [outside the family]. "Today he goes his way and I go my own way," said one woman referring to elements of individualism that have taken control of families. This woman's words also reflect the

typical stereotypical tradition that takes “man” as the provider for the family, while the woman plays her role as *basadi* (a Setswana word for “the one who stays at home”), looking after the children and household. Another added, “People have forgotten about ploughing. They no longer want to stay in the villages. We are consuming all the time, not producing any more. We do not want to do anything for ourselves, not doing anything to sustain ourselves . . . we should vary the means of getting money. Encourage gardening. . . .”

The challenge of these trends as we study family strengths is: how can we maintain stability in the family and at the same time continue to satisfy family functions? It is a fact that there has been a shift in the expected roles of men and women. One area where significant change can be seen is in raising children. One man observed,

Raising children is a challenge but it’s one of the most interesting things in the family. It’s a challenge because you have to provide them with everything they want and it’s interesting because you see yourself as someone [important] among other people and it’s challenging when it comes to education. You have to teach your children from A-Z, how they should behave, work with other people, and how to cooperate.

A woman argued that, “Women should still raise children, men do not take the responsibility. If they don’t, who will take care of the children?” Another woman responded, “Raising children used to not be a big problem. Children did not go to school but now they [parents] need to raise money to take children to school. The young people no longer look after their children. They give them to their mothers.” This is especially true as more and more Batswana women leave their homes for paid employment or to further their education.

Evidently, if role expectations are not fulfilled, relationships are likely to be strained. While in some countries such as Sweden and the United Kingdom some men can willingly trade roles as “housedads” or “housefathers,” most men in Botswana would find this embarrassing. To change these societal attitudes and role expectations requires that we start doing something about it in our homes, including capitalizing on the strength of our children. Children are excellent at mimicking. They can mimic adults and their siblings from a very early age. For example, those who grow up seeing their fathers changing diapers are more likely to practice that same behavior when they grow into adults. As a man evolves into this “new man,” some old practices need to be discarded in

order to make way for new ones and this is a big challenge. If not carefully managed, role distribution among family members has the potential to destroy relationships and families.

The Challenge of Politics

Although Botswana legislation recognizes the role of women in politics, the public seems not to appreciate the role played by women who are in politics. Except for three of the eleven people I interviewed, the rest were of the opinion that women should leave politics alone. Experience has shown that the women do not handle politics well, they claimed. "Politics is not good for women. [We must recognize that] man is the head of family but women want to take that role." When women join politics they are still regarded as inferior. "The women chiefs are undermined," remarked one man. "There is use of bad words/language in politics and women should not partake in this." While the role of *Kgosi* (chief) was appreciated, most of the people were cognizant of the fact that the chief's role was being modernized.

"The *Kgosi* is not as traditional as they used to be. Again, people do not value the *Kgotla* system anymore; they no longer go for meetings," one man said. "Traditionally, it was better, the *Kgosi* used to be innocent. With diamonds everywhere you can't trust them now," another man argued. One woman reported, "After elections [politicians] stop their promises." Through many of the interviews, they kept referring to "corrupt politicians." It was clear that the older generation would want to maintain the traditional *Kgotla*, while the young want to modernize it. We will explore some of the strengths derived from this system of governance later in this chapter.

Economic Challenges

Botswana as a nation is doing quite well on the economic front. However, unemployment is one of the major challenges with which the country is battling. In the year 2004, it was reported that 17% of students who had graduated from the University of Botswana in 2003 were without jobs (Department of Institutional Planning, 2004). At the same time, the official national unemployment figure was almost 24% (*The World Factbook*, 2006). Effects of unemployment are mostly felt at the grassroots where basic survival becomes a big challenge. One man put it simply, "If not working you can't feed your family. You cannot take your children to school. Sometimes I have no money; it's not enough. The

government is not helping.” Another, though he is employed, remarked that, “We are dying. You cannot buy what you can eat the whole day. Things have gone up and we buy one item at a time because we are buying everything from A-Z. . . . People no longer plough. We used to have enough to eat. Now you need to look inside your pocket for everything.” Other statements:

- Raising children has become very expensive because we only rely on income from salaries.
- Prices have gone up and most people are jobless.
- We end up supporting other members of the extended family in addition to our own family commitments.
- Because of money, not enough jobs, prostitution is increasing.

These statements indicate the hardships generally felt by the common man as a result of the absence or gradual loss of buying power. This has been made more complicated by additional factors including the devaluation of the local currency (the *Pula*), and HIV/AIDS. As discussed above, Botswana is a society in mourning. Everyone has been affected or is infected with HIV (Mogae, 2003) and this has caused people to question and redefine some of their traditional practices. For example, one woman remarked, “The time we take before burying our loved ones is too long. . . . Sometimes it takes more than a week, and meanwhile you have to feed the people three meals a day, and it becomes very expensive. Where does the money come from?” Another commented, “Long back, people used to chip in during funerals with anything they have. They came to the funeral carrying something on their heads. Some would bring firewood. Now you have to buy [even the firewood]. Multitudes come and you have to feed them.”

The advent of HIV/AIDS has had serious social and economic consequences for Botswana. The process of mourning and burying the deceased is becoming more stressful than the death itself due to financial costs associated with the funerals. In the process, culturally appropriate knowledge and practices are being reconstructed.

From what we have seen so far, it is clear that as the Botswana society transforms into modernity, some of the traditional practices and values that might seem outdated are being challenged by youths and adults alike. For example, while the concept of extended family might be seen as a strong African principle (Mberengwa & Johnson, 2004), young people view this as deprivation of personal space, as was noted by one young man during an interview. The unwritten African law of “what’s

yours is mine, leads to the weight of going through life with the extended family leaving little personal space.” In addition, important decisions are made on a person’s behalf because they are either children or not in the right family position (Ministry of Local Government, 2001). Courtship practices which tend to be done in secrecy away from parents, the issues of *lobola* (dowry), and inheritance are cultural practices that need to be re-examined as new forms of families and new ways of family interaction evolve in Botswana.

Family Strengths

Given the above scenarios, one might ask: What is left of families in Botswana? Is the family as an institution becoming more and more irrelevant in people’s lives? What strengths persist in the Botswana culture that can help rescue the family from collapsing? It appears that most of the challenges cited above revolve around the issues of marriage and HIV/AIDS, so our discussion in this section will anchor on these two adversities and see how families negotiate the otherwise disastrous consequences. Strengthening marriage is the pivot of family survival. If the family is strong, a marriage is successful.

Setswana is the culture of the people of Botswana. When asked to identify aspects of this culture that might have a positive influence on families, one woman quickly remarked, “Bring back the initiation days,” referring to the old practice where young people were taught about the process of marriage and *proper* behavior as a man or woman. One of the specific issues they were taught and encouraged to do was to refrain from sexual intercourse before marriage. Dating and socialization between the opposite sexes was discouraged. Girls were expected to be virgins at the time of marriage and this would bring pride to the parents, aunts, and all. Failure to observe this practice would shame the family, let alone the whole tribe.

A harsh side of abstinence existed. One young man who had gone through the process remarked: “Abstinence is painful. It is like walking in a desert carrying a bottle of water and not being able to drink from it” (Latitude, 2005). However, he added, “The pain and waiting were worth it.” Today, some sectors of the society capitalize on the practice of abstinence from sex as one of the ways that can be used to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS among the youth. The strength of this strategy comes out in the separation of the sexes. In typical Botswana culture, boys lived at the cattle post looking after the livestock while the women and girls lived at the villages. Boys and girls, men and women, even married couples

could be further separated during other ceremonies, church services, and some holy days. Separation was also a way of controlling knowledge about sex. The challenge, when we compare with life today, was to discover ways of connecting and bonding without sex. Thus, marriage would be a union of “two pure people.” It is unlike today where knowledge is impossible to control with the advent of the television, the internet, novels, and magazines.

All interviewees acknowledged that today’s marriages do not survive. The big question then is: what can be done to the marriages to strengthen them so that they can last? The key mechanism that needs to be invigorated is that of guidance. The problem is that there is no more preparation for marriage. Marriage was a milestone that one had to strive to achieve, unlike today, when some individuals just find themselves in different forms of unions. “People need to be informed of how to take care of your husband or wife. What are your expectations as a man or woman? All those things are important,” reported one woman. Along the same line of thought, another woman remarked, “How to be a woman, how to be a man—if brought back can help change behavior . . . Although you may say girls married early, *they were guided*, and they knew what they were going into.” This guidance was provided through well-established mechanisms within the extended family structure. With the gradually-diminishing role being played by the extended family in Botswana today, the gap continues to widen about who is there to provide the counseling that is so much needed to harness some of these social problems. A significant proportion of households are without adults due to HIV/AIDS, hence, the advent of child-headed families. Who is there to counsel these adult-children? What is society doing to make their lives easier? Again, at the community level, we find missing the strength that was once embedded in the functioning of the extended family system. A child belonged to all so the child would continue to get guidance in case the biological parents were not available. In contrast today, these children are stigmatized.

In some religious sectors of the community, prayers form an important part of the process of marriage. “Prayers bring spiritual discipline. Special prayers for a marriage commence within the church well before the two people are united,” reported one church elder. He added, “Marriage is a commitment made before God and the family and should be respected.” One man also remarked that people need “respect for marriages. That way we will have fewer divorce cases, if it can be done. It will also reduce HIV and AIDS.”

Other suggested strategies that could save marriages:

Couples also need to know that when faced with a problem they should speak about it.

There must be love in the family and it is important to feel loved.

If people can stick to their culture it will avoid a lot of clashes.

On a more general note one woman observed, “Go back to our culture, for example of ploughing, helping each other. We have lost the helping hand. For me to help, you have to pay. Bring back that love, work together. We have lost our love for each other. . . .” Another added, “The traditional way of providing for the family through ploughing and livestock keeping is good.” Once again, the strength derived from being self-reliant and doing things together, either as a family or community is being brought up as a mechanism that made it possible to solve challenges confronting communities. Ploughing was a communal event that brought people together by sharing resources—both human and material, and this made communities strong.

As stated in a previous section of this chapter, the frequency of deaths happening in a particular family are making people feel the economic strains, because responsibilities for funerals are quickly becoming a family’s affair, rather than a communal event that they used to be. Traditional communal values and ways of interaction, if resuscitated, have potential to strengthen families and communities so that they are better equipped to confront whatever challenges they face. Surely, it needs an army rather than a general to fight some of these social battles facing Botswana today.

After listening to many people and reading, I constructed Table 2, which compares traditional values in Botswana society to emerging trends. It was the opinion of some interviewees that if practiced, the traditional values seem to have potential to rescue the family from collapsing. These values seemed to bind families together in the past and rid them of challenges which are causing havoc among families today.

An additional strength of the Botswana culture is embedded in its system of governance which is founded in the traditional *Kgotla* system. The *Kgotla* is the centre for the traditional political system where tribal elders hear complaints, disputes and debate village affairs. Today, the *Kgotla* has become the forum where government policies are explained to the populace and where major decisions take place. It is led by the traditional leader called the Chief who acts as the central figure around whom tribal life revolves (University of Botswana, 2005). Public consultation is an important feature of Botswana’s democratic tradi-

TABLE 2. Comparison of traditional values versus emerging trends.

Traditional Values	Emerging Trends
Honesty	Corruption and deceit
Compassionate and sharing	Greed, selfishness
Discipline, self-discipline	Hooliganism
Faithfulness, commitment	Fornication (adultery)
Dignity	Immorality
Togetherness, solidarity, interdependence	Individualism
Humility	Pride
Self-reliance	Dependency

tions and the *kgotla* is meant to provide a unique forum for open discussion and a free and proper exchange of ideas and views—ideals which the present government tries to uphold. Thus, the *Kgotla*, provides a model on how to deal with disputes. At the grassroots level, people should learn about the importance of communication and arriving at shared decisions from the way issues are deliberated at the *Kgotla*. These two values seem to be lacking and are also being attributed to the breakdown of moral aspects in the nation.

My interviewees held mixed opinions about the importance of the *Kgotla* as it exists today. Many were aware that they are there to inform them about developments happening in their villages and in the country. One man remarked, “I really don’t understand it. They help settle issues. People should learn to settle [their] issues at home and not run to the *Kgotla* every time.” Generally, they were of the opinion that the *Kgotla* had been modernized. “The young do not want to go there for meetings anymore,” one interviewee said. Another added, “Ministers don’t care about people. Devaluation [of the standard of currency] is done without consulting people,” thus challenging the extent to which the essential value of public consultation is practiced. Efforts must not be spared to redress the people’s concerns about how the *Kgotla* is functioning now so as to harness its strength before this important structure is destroyed. What is needed is to re-inject the import values they have upheld for so many years.

Botho is a concept describing a person who has a well-rounded character, who is well mannered, courteous and disciplined. This is reflected in the Setswana saying whose English translation is, “Let not our children be without soul.” This saying implies nurturing total development of children including moral aspects of life that are equally important; they

should not be neglected and parents should aim for the total growth of the children.

Respect is an important aspect of the spirit of *botho*. The process for earning respect is defined by giving it, and the process for gaining empowerment is by empowering others. Most of our interviewees agreed that there was little respect left in the Botswana society. "People no longer respect especially the adults. In the past, we used even to kneel for adults, but its no longer the case these days," reported one woman. "It is difficult to control kids now. They no longer live with parents," added another. "From primary school kids are out of hand because of the issue of equal rights; they know they are not supposed to be beaten. People are now influenced by human rights," observed one man.

The pain and concern of these interviewees is felt as they describe how some of the cultural values that used to bind their society were being eroded. What can be done to bring back the respect that seemed to cushion societies? It appears that, just like in the issue of marriage discussed above, the solution lies in education and modeling appropriate behavior to our children. It is respect that binds relationships, siblings, couples, family members, and societies together.

Botswana should capitalize on its economic strength and rescue the family. Unlike most African countries, Botswana is politically stable with no wars. Marked technological advancements and improved infrastructure that facilitate easier communication and transportation continue to be made. These make it possible for the government to embark on progressive and comprehensive programs for dealing with HIV/AIDS and other national development programs, such as the provision of improved infrastructure including schools and clinics, so that they can benefit all people countrywide. These have already started bearing fruit as reported above, regarding knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Other progressive national policies also exist. For example, Botswana is the only African country with women chiefs (currently three), who provide a vital link between the grassroots and government.

CONCLUSIONS

Significant social changes have taken place in the 40 years since Botswana's independence in 1966, transforming social life from a predominantly agricultural rural society to a fast-paced modern society. Some people are slow to accept the changes while others flow with the tide. Bottlenecks to development efforts are to be expected and these

are evident in the passion killings, teenage pregnancies, suicidal tendencies among youth, lack of discipline, dependency syndrome, and unemployment. Today, Botswana is going through a period in which HIV/AIDS is reshaping society. Social programs for both men and women, boys and girls of all ages should be put in place to cushion those in need. To date, it has been observed that these have favored women more than men, hence, the increase in social evils like passion killings (*The Botswana Gazette*, 2005).

It appears the general public is crying for a “return to the past” as a solution to the many social challenges confronting Botswana. This is a past where extended families reigned, and where communal values were upheld. This means resuscitating and redefining values and functioning systems which are quickly being eroded with modernization—values of respect, tolerance, togetherness, sharing, compassion (caring), honesty, discipline, dignity, solidarity, and many others. Let us remember and acknowledge that it is the observance of these core values that seems to have bound families and sustained the older generations that are becoming a rare species in Botswana. It is extremely dangerous to have a nation full of people with no morals. No matter how developed we become, it is a societal obligation to know what is right and wrong. Permissiveness should be controlled among the youth by upholding the do’s and don’ts that seem to have held the moral fiber of the African culture including Botswana society.

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