



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

STATEMENT BY
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OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA
DURING
THE HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development'

14 JULY 2021

**Mr. President of the Economic and Social Council,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen;**

1. It gives me great pleasure and honour as I join the international community at this year's High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to engage on the theme ***'Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.'***
2. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly offset the momentum and global gains already made in the implementation of SDGs, since their adoption in 2015. Sadly, lives have been lost; economic growth has been sluggish and bedevilled by rising and unsustainable debt levels; and there has been disruptions to people's everyday life.

3. As such, the COVID-19 subject matter remains the primary focus at all major international fora as we continue to grapple with bringing the pandemic under control, mitigating its socioeconomic impact as well as facilitating communities at household level to recover better and set their livelihoods back in motion.
4. The choice of the goals being reviewed this year, namely Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17 demonstrates this urgency as these are not only directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but are central to achieving the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Excellencies,

5. You may recall that following the July 2020 session of the HLPF, we witnessed the biggest global vaccination campaign in history. While COVID-19 vaccines were produced in record time, their inoculation continues, in order to counter the ravaging pandemic.
6. However, concerns of access remain especially that millions of people in the global-south are still left behind with no

certainty of when and how long it will take for them to be reached. This calls for urgent global action to ensure vaccine equity especially that COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Africa, showing signs of mutations and new variants.

7. This notwithstanding, we applaud the speed with which the United Nations COVAX Facility took action to ensure equitable access and delivery of vaccines to the global-south. Without doubt, the United Nations Charter was once again upheld by the men and women under its watch. This demonstrates the principle of multilateralism and that indeed, “the United Nations Organisation” is for all nations, big and small.

Excellencies,

8. I call upon this year’s High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to emphasise the need to build resilient health systems, particularly in developing countries. In this regard, Botswana applauds the initiative to set up a technology transfer hub for the manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines in South Africa.

9. We are informed that the hub will allow the African continent to enhance its capacity to take full responsibility for the health of its own people, including a waiver for intellectual property and exchange of technology.
10. Beyond the health response, it is necessary to strengthen the broad based social protection systems, invest in sustainable infrastructure and harness the interlinkages and trade-offs between the various SDGs. Failure to do so, renders commitments made by World Leaders at the 2019 SDGs Summit, only a wish list as millions of dollars meant to intensify SDG implementation have been diverted to finance the socioeconomic costs of the pandemic.

Excellencies,

11. Botswana has not been spared as the pace at which interventions for various goals were implemented, either slowed down or stalled.
12. Currently, the number of COVID-19 cases and mortalities of our population continue to rise. Botswana also experienced significant disruptions to productive capacity and the

consequent loss of income in certain key sectors of the economy due to COVID-19 pandemic.

13. Inevitably, many households especially the female headed households, slipped back into poverty, thereby increasing the rift between the rich and the poor. The full scale of this impact and its associated gender based violence, particularly among women and children, is yet to be established.
14. In this regard, an Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan was developed to support the restoration of economic activity. This saw significant public financial resources re-directed towards health expenditure and the economic and social support for firms and households to ameliorate the impact of the pandemic.
15. Furthermore, Government of Botswana in collaboration with the UN Partners, launched the National Informal Sector Recovery Plan to provide mechanisms to cushion the many informal sector businesses from effects of COVID-19 pandemic.
16. The effect of all this has been the increasing deficit and a run-down of government buffers.

Excellencies,

16. With no end in sight of defeating the pandemic, two months ago in May 2021, Government announced further steps to “Reset” its 2020 National Development Plan Eleven priorities as an urgent move towards transforming our economy. This ‘whole of society approach’ called for re-evaluation of the way government had been doing things to zero in on; (i) the need to save Botswana from COVID-19; (b) intensifying efforts towards Digitisation, and (c) value chain development.

17. In this regard, Botswana continued the roll-out of an extensive COVID-19 vaccination plan to save lives at both national and sub-national levels. While enough doses to vaccinate the entire adult population have been ordered from various sources, available stocks continue to drip in.

18. Our robust public health care system built from scratch since independence in 1966, remains the bedrock for a smooth vaccine rollout. Currently, the Ministry of Health and Wellness continues to enhance its capacity to keep up with this challenge.

Excellencies,

19. Botswana also adopted “a whole of government approach to digital transformation” due to its immense potential to unlock productivity and improve service delivery.

20. Through the SmartBots Project, universal wifi coverage will be prioritized by connecting all villages to high-speed internet over a two year period. Schools, health facilities and the traditional *Dikgotla* meeting places would enjoy free internet access. ICT will no longer just be a subject in schools but a tool for learning.

21. Other significant innovative ICT initiatives geared towards realising SDG 3 targets include ‘*the Drone for Health*’ project. Once fully functional it will deliver timely, maternal health supplies, especially to the hard-to-reach communities and thus accelerate the reduction of preventable maternal deaths. This work is spearheaded by the Government of Botswana, in partnership with United Nations Population Fund and Botswana International University of Science and Technology.

22. Partnerships within the digital space will continue to be strengthened amongst the various players, and most importantly absorb the ICT savvy cohort of our young people. This, and other openings within the value chain development have the potential to unlock opportunities for new, high-growth companies and youth employment.

Excellencies,

23. As part of accelerating SDG implementation at policy level, we kick-started the process of integrating SDGs targets and indicators into sectoral strategies and plans, to enable them to permeate the national planning and budgeting processes. Botswana is also developing an SDG Financing Strategy to help leverage multi sector financing to support the realisation of national priorities, including the SDGs. All this work is done through the support of the UN Family in Botswana.

Excellencies,

24. We commit to strengthening our partnership with the UN System and other development partners, private sector, civil society organisations and the academia.

25. This provides the necessary support for Botswana to gain momentum to *recover faster, better and stronger* during this **Decade of Action**.

26. As I conclude, let me reaffirm Botswana's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2021 Ministerial Declaration.

27. I thank you for your attention.