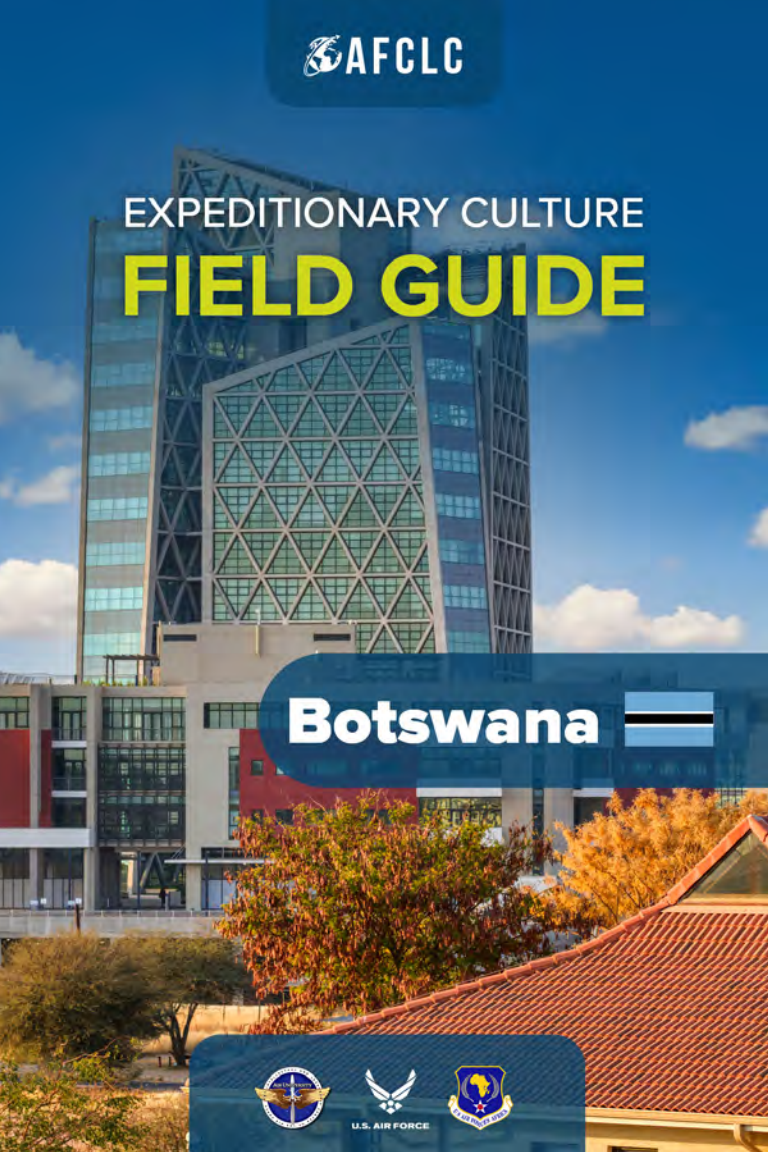
AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE

# FIELD GUIDE

## Botswana



U.S. AIR FORCE

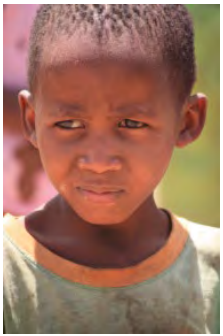
# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 introduces "Culture General," the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 presents "Culture Specific" Botswana, focusing on unique cultural features of Botswana's society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned location.



For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

**Disclaimer:** All text is the property of the AFCLC and may not be modified by a change in title, content, or labeling. It may be reproduced in its current format with the expressed permission of the AFCLC. All photography is provided as a courtesy of the US government, Wikimedia, and other sources as indicated. ***Please scroll over images to view captions.***

# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

### Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal

consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

### Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.

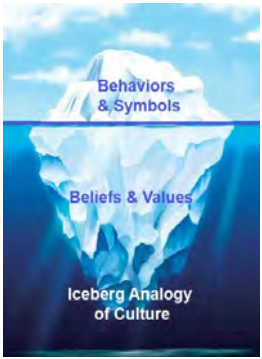
As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview– how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

### Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.




### Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and

greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across

generations and ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles.

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European

presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the ǃKung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai, along with

some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.

Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective "national" identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as "tribalism."

This "class versus descent" scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote "greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples" by building partnerships in all segments of "civil society."

## 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also

create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed their worldview through their indigenous religions.

Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity.

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions.

The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through sickness, death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

## 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families. Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.

First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.

These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced.

Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of single parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

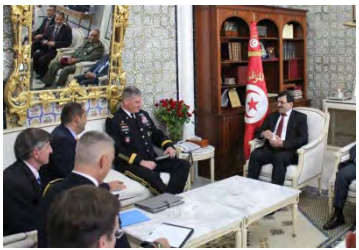
## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to

adopt multilingual practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional "indigenous" languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their "release" from colonial rule and to preserve a sense of indigenous identity.



While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also

hamper progress. According to 2023 statistics, about 100 million African children and youth were out of school, of which 35 million were of primary school age.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa,

recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.

Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly "white" game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture "Invictus," exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.

Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world's dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there is also a

growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 18% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 68% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 95% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.

These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 65% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to basic drinking water, water-born bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.

Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of fastest growing regions in the world.

Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.

International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Botswana's society.

# PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

## 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

### Historical Overview

The history of Botswana is a story of assimilation and resistance. Although this history is often overshadowed by events in neighboring countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, a close study reveals how Botswana has largely avoided a turbulent post-colonial period and instead enjoyed a stable political system and steady economic development.

*Note*: In this Field Guide, citizens of the Republic of Botswana are called ***Batswana***, a Bantu word meaning "the Tswana people." Although this term originally referred only to members of the Tswana tribes (see p.8 of *Political and Social Relations*), it now refers to citizens of all ethnicities, including for example, white Europeans and the Sarwa.

### Early Botswana History

The earliest inhabitants of present-day Botswana were the Khoe and the San, two distinct ethnic groups which share many linguistic and physical characteristics and are often referred to collectively as the Khoe-San. Artifacts discovered in the Tsodilo hills in northwestern Botswana (see "The Louvre of the Desert") indicate that the Khoe-San settled permanently in the region at least 19,000 years ago.

Archaeologists classify the Khoe-San as a Late Stone Age culture, meaning that they subsisted as foraging hunters and gatherers and made tools from stone, wood, and bone. About 3,000 years ago, the Khoe began to herd sheep and cattle on lush grasslands exposed by the retreat of the Okavango Delta and Makgadikgadi Lakes, giving rise to a division between Khoe herders and San foragers.

**The Louvre of the Desert**

Tsodilo, a group of quartzite rock formations located among sand dunes and dry lake beds near the Namibian border, is the most famous archaeological site in Botswana. Its many caves scattered among four small mountains are believed to have attracted transitory human occupants up to 100,000 years ago. The 4,500 cave paintings found there have earned Tsodilo its reputation as the "Louvre of the Desert." The paintings feature animals, humans, and geometric shapes, often with distinctive proportions. Although the origin of the paintings is not clear, it is generally believed that they were created by a people similar to the Khoe-San, beginning over 2,000 years ago and continuing through the mid-19th century. The paintings often depict historical milestones, such as the introduction of cattle, the migration of Bantu farmers, and the use of horses for transportation.

## Bantu Migrations

The first great change to the population of southern Africa came with the arrival of Bantu-speaking farmers with Iron Age technology, who are thought to have migrated to the area from north of the equator in two great waves. The first wave originated in western Africa and reached the upper Zambezi River on the northern border of Botswana by 300 BC, while the second wave originated in eastern Africa and reached the lower Zambezi River on the coast of Mozambique by 20 BC.

Khoe pottery began showing Iron Age influences as early as 200 BC, and the earliest fully Iron Age site in Botswana, a smelting furnace near the eastern city of Palapye, dates to 190 AD. This discovery is consistent with the general consensus that the bulk of Bantu migration to what is now Botswana occurred during the first few centuries of the Common Era, also known as AD.

Although Bantu migrants had superior technology and eventually a much larger population, it would take centuries for their language and culture to displace those of the Khoe-San.

This long period of co-existence, along with abundant evidence of intermarriage, suggests that the two cultures lived side-by-side in relative peace. Today, some Batswana of ostensibly Bantu origin have distinctly Khoe-San physical characteristics not found in Bantu groups outside of southern Africa.

### Origin of the Tswana Tribes

Over many centuries, Bantu migrants spread across southern Africa and formed a variety of distinct, closely related ethnic and linguistic groups. Between 1200 and 1400, the Sotho-Tswana group, which comprises the Kgalagadi, Sotho, and Tswana ethnic groups, rose to prominence in the Transvaal, a region to the immediate southeast of present-day Botswana.

In the early 1500s, the Tswana began moving from the Transvaal into present-day southeastern Botswana. From there, smaller groups of Tswana spread out and settled new lands, often forming their own tribes and assimilating or conquering indigenous populations. In this way, the greater Tswana ethnic group diffused into a number of smaller tribes with similar but distinct sets of characteristics.

### Difaqane

Beginning in the mid-18th century, southern Africa saw a rapid increase in warfare and migration. Originally based in what is now eastern South Africa, the Zulu were motivated by drought and social unrest to wage a series of expansionary wars in the beginning of the 19th century, forcing many tribes in the affected areas to move. This period of migrations, known among the Batswana as the ***difaqane***, or scattering, lasted roughly from 1815 to 1840.

During the ***difaqane***, the Batswana suffered mainly at the hands of the Kololo and Ndebele tribes, who raided large portions of the Transvaal on their way to present-day Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania. Another aspect of the ***difaqane***, and significant in the history of southern Africa as a whole, was the expanding European presence in the region. Settlers from the west, slavers from the east, and ivory traders from all corners

joined a mad scramble to claim increasingly scarce arable land, capture slaves, and control key trade routes. Although mainly beyond Botswana's borders, these activities had profound effects on Tswana political structures.

### The Rise of the Tswana States

The ***difaqane*** showed that divided Tswana tribes were highly vulnerable to attack, so in the 1840s the Kwena, Ngwaketse, and Ngwato tribes formed a loose alliance of states under King Sekgoma I of the Ngwato. Each state was organized into wards, which were ruled by ***dikgosi***, or chiefs, who paid tribute to the king. Despite this political alliance, the states continued to compete fiercely to collect and trade products from the countryside such as ivory, ostrich feathers, and root rubber. The Kwena initially dominated the trade routes linking the Tswana states with European traders in the Cape Colony (located in present-day South Africa), but the Ngwato eventually overtook them in the 1870s under the rule of Khama III, the son and successor of Sekgoma I.

### European Traders

The first Europeans to arrive in present-day Botswana were explorers and traders who came seeking their share of the ivory trade in the mid-19th century. The influx of traders gradually shifted the Tswana states away from bartering and towards a cash economy. Meanwhile, the Tswana sought to limit the expansion of European traders in order to protect their lucrative control over trade routes with the Cape Colony.

### Christian Missionaries

The same roads which allowed the Tswana states to trade with the Cape Colony also allowed the first Christian missionaries to reach the Tswana states. David Livingstone of the London Missionary Society (LMS) was one of the first, establishing a station in 1845 at Kolobeng which he used as a base for both missionary activities and desert expeditions, including 10 years of trekking across the Kalahari. Livingstone's first convert was Sechele, the Kwena chief, who was baptized in 1848. Over the next few years, other Tswana chiefs also converted, occasionally resulting in political

turmoil. The most notable example is Khama III, who became a Christian after meeting German Lutheran missionaries in 1858. Khama III's conversion angered his father Sekgoma I, the reigning Ngwato chief and Tswana king, eventually leading to a power struggle between father and son. Khama III prevailed and exiled his father in 1875, and then worked with the LMS to promote Christianity in the Tswana states, an undertaking which helped Khama III expand and consolidate his own power.

Christian missionaries also had an impact on Tswana social life. Although Christian missionaries founded schools, nursed the sick and wounded, taught homemaking skills, and introduced agricultural technology, they often did so partially because of political agreements which gave them the exclusive right to evangelize a certain ward. Furthermore, Christian missionaries largely disrespected local traditions and sought to replace them with "civilized" European customs, often by displacing Tswana chiefs who defended traditional practices.

The Tswana chiefs who cooperated with Christian missionaries were often partially motivated by a desire to preserve their authority and social rank (see *Religion and Spirituality*). However, the greatest political legacy of the Christian missionaries would be their role in helping to secure Protectorate status for the Tswana states.

### The Protectorate of Bechuanaland

In the 19th century, the British were primarily concerned with preserving their interests in the Cape Colony, a vital trading outpost and waypoint for journeys to India. Because the Tswana states did not present any threat to these interests, they were largely ignored.

However, matters changed in the 1850s with the formation of independent Boer republics east of the Tswana states and the German annexation of South West Africa (present-day Namibia) in 1884. The Boers are the descendants of Dutch-speaking settlers in the South African Cape frontier. Fearing that the Germans in South West Africa would ally with the Boers in the Transvaal and block British access to trade routes, the British incorporated the Tswana states into the Protectorate of Bechuanaland in 1885.

### The British South Africa Company

Britain hoped to administer the protectorate using as few resources as possible. However, just one year after its establishment, Boers in the Transvaal discovered gold near present-day Johannesburg, greatly expanding both Boer power and British concerns. In response, Britain hoped to transfer the protectorate to the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and its leader Cecil Rhodes. A prominent Cape Colony businessman, Rhodes wanted to link the Cape Colony with Rhodesia (a BSAC colony in present-day Zimbabwe which was a former unrecognized southern African state) by building a railway through Bechuanaland. In addition, Rhodes secretly sought to protect his interest in the newly-discovered gold mines from the Boers by using Bechuanaland to stage an attack and bring the Transvaal under British rule.

### The Tswana Chiefs Visit London

The Tswana chiefs did not trust Rhodes, with three of them – Khama III of the Ngwato, Bathoen of the Ngwaketse, and Sebele of the Kwena – travelling to London in 1895 to ask the British not to cede Bechuanaland to the BSAC.

To protect the Tswana's interest, Britain agreed not to cede the entire Protectorate to Rhodes. In return, the chiefs agreed to pay administrative taxes to help defray British costs to administer Bechuanaland and to cede a small strip of land in eastern Bechuanaland for the railroad.

### The Jameson Raid

Eventually, Rhodes gained control of eastern Bechuanaland and soon afterwards arranged a raid on the Boer republics. Led by British statesman Leander Starr Jameson, the raid was intended to spark an uprising among British expatriates and lead to the overthrow of the Boer government. However, the uprising never materialized, and Jameson's forces were quickly routed. The raid was deeply embarrassing for the British government, which swiftly stripped the BSAC of its territory in Bechuanaland. The Jameson Raid effectively ended hopes for large-scale European settlement, resulting in the independent character of modern Botswana.

### The Unwanted Protectorate

After the failure of the Jameson Raid, Britain invested as little as possible in the protectorate while still exerting control over the Tswana chiefs. Although the chiefs were nominally free to govern their own wards, they were not allowed to levy taxes, dispense justice, or prosecute wars without heavy regulation. In addition, the British collected their own taxes in order to defray administrative costs, beginning with the hut tax of 1899 and continuing with the native tax of 1919.

Many Batswana did not have cash to pay these taxes, forcing them to undertake wage labor or migrate to South Africa. This marginalization of the Batswana was formalized in 1919 and 1920, when the British government established separate governing councils for natives and Europeans. By the early 1920s, Bechuanaland had been reduced to a way station between South Africa and Rhodesia.

### Seretse Khama

After Khama III's death in 1923, his son, Sekgoma II, ruled the Ngwato for just two years before dying in 1925. Sekgoma II's son, Seretse Khama, was only 4 years old at the time, so a relative, Tshekedi Khama, took power as a caretaker king. Tshekedi Khama ruled quite progressively for the next 23 years, promoting improvements to the education system and organizing voluntary community service groups.

Meanwhile, Seretse Khamastudied abroad, first in South Africa and later in Britain, where he married a white woman named Ruth Williams in 1949. The Ngwato elders strongly objected to this marriage but ultimately relented after a series of ***kgotla***, or tribal councils. However, the apartheid regime in neighboring South Africa condemned Seretse Khama's marriage to a white woman and convinced Britain to declare him unfit to rule. Additionally, both Seretse and Tshekedi Khama were banished from the protectorate in 1950 and were not allowed to return to Bechuanaland until they renounced all claims to the chieftainship for themselves and their heirs in 1956.

### Nationalism and Independence

After the scandal over Seretse Khama's interracial marriage, it appeared that Bechuanaland would never become a part of South Africa and that it had to be prepared for independence. Between 1955 and 1966, as Britain finally increased development assistance to Botswana, several political parties began to take shape, with each favoring a different path to independence. The first was the Bechuanaland People's Party (BPP), founded in 1960, which called for immediate independence, nationalization of some lands, abolition of chieftaincies, and removal of Europeans from the civil service.

Becoming active again in local politics, Seretse Khama was concerned about the growing popularity of what he considered the BPP's extreme nationalist agenda. In 1962, he helped found the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) (Photo: Flag of the BDP), which called for a more gradual transition to independence. The BDP's agenda won the support of both the colonial administration and a broad cross-section of Batswana, from urban elites to the rural poor.

Following construction of Gaborone, the new capital city, Bechuanaland became self-governing and held elections in March 1965. The BDP won 28 of 31 seats, and Seretse Khama became the first prime minister. The stability and popularity of the BDP government allowed for the adoption of a constitution establishing the Republic of Botswana on September 30, 1966, with Seretse Khama as the first president.

### The Republic of Botswana

At the time of independence, Botswana was one of the poorest countries in the world and largely dependent upon British aid. However, the discovery of diamonds near the northeastern town of Orapa in 1967 allowed for swift and radical change (see p.1 of *Economics and Resources*). By 1969, Botswana had renegotiated its membership in the South African Customs Union allowing it to keep a larger share of the profits from its mineral exports. Due to its rapid economic growth, by 1971 Botswana no longer needed British aid.

Although the economy of independent Botswana got off to a good start, foreign relations were complicated by a civil war in Rhodesia and the brutal apartheid regime in South Africa. Botswana accepted refugees from these countries but refused to harbor resistance movements. Intended to protect essential trading ties, this policy was not always successful: in the early 1980s, Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) accused Botswana of harboring armed rebels, leading to a border skirmish in 1983; in 1985 and 1986, the South African military raided offices in Gaborone allegedly belonging to the African National Congress (ANC), a group working to end apartheid. However, the heated geopolitics of southern Africa began to cool at the end of the 1980s as South Africa moved in earnest towards majority rule, granting independence to Namibia in 1990 and holding its first free elections in 1994.

Unlike its occasionally turbulent foreign relations, Botswana's internal politics have been stable: the country has had five Presidents, all members of the BDP. Seretse Khama served from independence until his death in July 1980, after which Ketumile Masire, his Vice President, assumed the Presidency. Masire served until his retirement in 1998, after which Festus Mogae, his Vice President, took office. Mogae served a shorter term due to the introduction of term limits, stepping down in 2008. His Vice President, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, the son of Seretse Khama, was then elected President. In April 2018, Ian Khama resigned as president completing the constitutionally mandated 10-year term limit. Makgweetse Eric Masisi was elected president and assumed the position on April 01, 2018.

The BDP has also controlled the legislature by comfortable margins since independence. However, Khama's growing reputation for authoritarianism (see p.3 of *Political and Social Relations*) along with the heavy toll taken on Botswana's economy by the global economic downturn (see p.1 of *Economics and Resources*) may weaken the BDP's hold on political power in future elections.

# 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

**Official Name**
Republic of Botswana
*Lefatshe la Botswana*

**Political Borders**
Namibia: 845 mi
South Africa: 1,143 mi
Zambia: 0 mi (single point)
Zimbabwe: 505 mi

**Capital**
Gaborone

**Demographics**
Botswana has a population of approximately 2.45 million which is growing about 1.34% per year. About 29% of the population is under age 15, and 73% of the population lives in urban areas. Botswana has the world's 4th highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate next to Eswatini (Swaziland), Lesotho, and South Africa with approximately 16% Batswana infected (see p.3-4 of *Sustenance and Health*). With a land mass slightly smaller than Texas but less than 1/12th of the population, Botswana is one of the least densely-populated countries in Africa.

**Flag**
The flag is light blue with a black stripe outlined in white extending horizontally across the center. The light blue color represents rain (***pula)***, a common theme in Botswana symbolism which also appears in its coat-of-arms and currency. The black and white stripes represent racial harmony.

**Geography**
Botswana is a land-locked country located in central southern Africa. It borders Namibia to the west, South Africa to the south and east, Zambia to the north, and Zimbabwe to the northeast. The capital, Gaborone, lies in the extreme Southeast among the

rolling hills which cover the eastern part of the country. The rest of Botswana, about 80% of its total area, is covered by the Kalahari Desert (also known as the Kgalagadi Desert), which hosts vegetation ranging from dense woodlands in the North to sparse shrubs and small trees in the Southwest. About 40% of Botswana's land area enjoys protected status as part of a natural park, wildlife preserve, or wildlife management area.

### Climate

Botswana has a semi-arid, sub-tropical climate with temperate winters and hot summers. In Gaborone, average winter temperatures range from 49°F to 72°F, and average summer temperatures range from 67°F to 84°F. The summer wet season extends from October through April, during which Gaborone averages 2.5 inches of rain per month. The winter dry season lasts from May through August.

### Natural Hazards

Partially due to its low rainfall, surface water is extremely scarce in Botswana. Although reservoirs generally meet the water needs of major cities, those living in the countryside or on cattle ranches in the Kalahari generally rely upon wells. Unfortunately, installing these wells erodes the land and accelerates the already rapid process of desertification.

### Government

A parliamentary republic divided into 10 districts and 6 town councils, Botswana has 7 political parties, with the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) dominating national politics since Botswana's independence in 1966. Botswana has a dual legal system in which the customary law of tribal communities exists alongside, but is subordinate to, common law created through a legal court system (see p.2-3 of *Sex and Gender)*.

### Executive Branch

The President, currently Mokgweetse Eric Masisi since Ian Khama's resignation in April 2018, is chief-of-state, head-of-government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The President also appoints the Vice President, currently Slumber Tsogwane since 2018.

The President is constitutionally limited to two 5-year terms and is elected indirectly, meaning that the leader of the party with a majority in the National Assembly becomes president.

### Legislative Branch

Botswana has a 2-chamber Parliament composed of a House of Chiefs and a National Assembly.

**House of Chiefs:** The House of Chiefs is mainly an advisory chamber composed of 35 members.

- 8 are chiefs of the primary Tswana tribes and serve as permanent, non-voting members.
- 22 are indirectly elected by the chiefs.
- 5 are appointed by the president.

**National Assembly:** The National Assembly is composed of 65 members who serve 5-year terms.

- 58 are elected by popular vote.
- 5 are appointed by the majority party.
- 2, the President and the Attorney General, serve as non-voting members.

### Judicial Branch

The judicial branch is composed of a High Court, a Court of Appeals, and 10 Magistrates' Courts (one in each district).

### Political Climate

Botswana is recognized throughout Africa for its stable democracy. Although the BDP has enjoyed uninterrupted control of the Presidency and the National Assembly since independence (see p.8 of *History and Myth*), there is no evidence that the BDP has used any illegal tactics to win elections. Rather, the BDP owes its long tenure to broad support among rural Batswana and an electoral system that averts Botswana's historically fractured opposition.

However, the global economic decline has taken a heavy toll on Botswana's economy (see p.1 of *Economics and Resources*), and former President Khama had been criticized for his allegedly authoritarian policies, such as supporting restrictions on journalism and creating the Directorate of Intelligence and

Security, which operates with little legislative oversight. These problems could endanger the BDP if a major opposition party such as the Botswana National Front (BNF), which had strong showings in the 1994 and 2004 elections, could rally a unified opposition.

### Defense

Botswana had no military until 11 years after independence, when continuous incursions from Rhodesian soldiers prompted the creation of the Botswana Defence Force (BDF). From a core of 132 personnel drawn from the paramilitary Police Mobile Unit, the BDF has developed into a highly professional and well-respected force of 9,000 active-duty members divided into an army and an air force. Although Botswana is landlocked and does not have a navy, the army does use airboats to patrol the rivers and lakes of northern Botswana.

For most of its early years, the BDF struggled to prevent regional turmoil from spilling over into Botswana. However, with the end of apartheid in South Africa, the conclusion of the Angolan Civil War, and the resolution of border disputes with Namibia; the BDF has shifted its focus to intercepting poachers in northern Botswana and stemming the tide of economic immigrants from Zimbabwe (see “Illegal Immigration” below). The BDF also has joined several international peacekeeping missions since the early 1990s, deploying forces to Somalia, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Sudan.

**Army:** The army, which is composed of 8,500 active-duty personnel, has traditionally been a purely light infantry force. Although the army is trying to expand its mechanized capabilities, these efforts have been complicated by a lack of properly trained personnel. Soldiers are stationed throughout the country at bases in Francistown, Gaborone, Ghanzi, Maun, Mmabatho, Selebi-Phikwi, and Tshabong.

**Air Force:** Comprising 500 active-duty personnel, the air force primarily provides air support to the army and police. Although it was historically a relatively small component of the BDF, the air

force has expanded its equipment and capabilities considerably since 1996, when it acquired 10 Canadair CF-5As, its first fighter jets. The air force now consists of 40 aircraft and 16 helicopters. Although small anti-poaching and transport squadrons are located at unofficial bases near Gaborone and Francistown, most of the air force is based about 22 miles outside of Molepolole at Mapharangwene Air Base, which was completed in 1997 with help from South Africa, France, Italy, and the UK.

**Training:** Since the 1980s, the BDF has been sending officers to military schools in the US, UK, Canada, and India. The BDF has particularly close ties with the US military, which provides significant International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds, and the British military, which sends the British Military and Advisory Training Team (BMATT) to train BDF personnel.

**Military Culture:** Employment with the BDF brings social prestige, so it is generally able to attract capable applicants. Similarly, high salaries discourage corruption among members, further reinforcing the BDF's image as a competent and faithful guardian of the public interest. However, there is a deep divide within the BDF between officers and the enlisted corps.

Officers often distrust enlisted personnel and feel that they must be carefully supervised. Officers, who are required to have a bachelor's degree, believe that they have a more strategic view of the military and the world than the less educated enlisted personnel, who are only required to have a high school diploma. This belief is perpetuated by the denial of education benefits to NCOs, a policy intended to prevent NCOs from demanding higher rank and pay.

# Botswanian Air Force Rank Insignia

Major General

Brigadier

Colonel

Lieutenant Colonel

Major

Captain

First Lieutenant

Second Lieutenant

Officer Cadet

Warrant Officer Class 1

Warrant Officer Class 2

Staff Sergeant

Sergeant

Corporal

Lance Corporal

## Security Issues

**Crime:** Crime is a serious security concern in Botswana, although it is mostly limited to crimes of opportunity such as home invasion, car robbery, and theft. Cell phone theft at knife point is particularly common, so foreign nationals should avoid using a cell phone while walking in public places. Similarly, foreign nationals should avoid Gaborone Dam and Kgale Hill in Gaborone at night due to a number of incidents in recent years. Finally, foreign nationals should be vigilant during frequent electric power outages, which can compromise security systems, doors, and gates.

**Illegal Immigration:** Turmoil in Zimbabwe has inspired a mass exodus of refugees, and by some estimates there are now 200,000 Zimbabweans residing illegally in Botswana. This issue has been a source of tension between the governments of Botswana and Zimbabwe, and in 2003 Botswana even threatened to build a border fence and detention center although later declined to do so.

## Diplomatic Relations

The primary goal of Botswana's diplomatic relations is to promote further integration among the member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) SADC is an intergovernmental organization of 16 member countries which seeks to establish political and economic stability in southern Africa by promoting good government and peaceful conflict resolution. Botswana seeks similar goals at the continental and international levels through its membership in the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN).

Despite this emphasis on regional cooperation, Botswana has had several disputes with neighboring countries in recent years. The most prominent has been with Zimbabwe, primarily concerning refugees and the controversial reelection of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe in 2008. Botswana has also clashed with Namibia about water rights in the Okavango Delta and ownership of a small island in the Chobe River.

**US-Botswana Relations:** Botswana enjoys strong bilateral relations with the US, which regards Botswana as an African success story and a shining example of sound economic and political development. The Peace Corps returned to Botswana in 2003 after a 5-year recess in order to focus on the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with Botswana one of 15 "focus countries" in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program. Instituted by President George W. Bush, this program has provided Botswana with over $1 billion in health assistance. In addition, the US and Botswana jointly finance and run the Gaborone-based International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), which trains police from across sub-Saharan Africa.

## Ethnic Relations

The ethnic landscape of modern Botswana is complex, contradictory, and, most of all, opaque: the only ethnic census in Botswana's history was taken in 1936, and the last racial census was taken in 1964. This lack of data makes sense in the context of ethnic assimilation policies intended to promote a singular national identity. However, the same lack of data also obscures the degree to which these policies have favored the culture and language of the Tswana majority at the expense of the non-Tswana minority.

Although 10-40% of Batswana belong to one of Botswana's 38 non-Tswana tribes, only the 8 Tswana tribes enjoy official recognition, permanent membership in the House of Chiefs, groups rights to land ownership, and protection of their tribal language in the media and education (see p.4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Since independence, the majority Tswana have been politically dominant.

Despite this potentially problematic situation, Botswana has experienced remarkably little ethnic discord. Partly due to the economic success and political stability of independent Botswana, most Batswana see themselves first as citizens of Botswana, and second as members of a tribe. Even Batswana who publicly campaign for equitable tribal policy often preface

their criticisms with praise for the broader success of Botswana's government. In addition, former President Khama had indicated a desire to move Botswana towards a legal and cultural framework that celebrates diversity as it promotes unity.

*Note:* In the Setswana language, the prefix ***ba-*** means "people of" and ***se-*** means "language of," so it is common, for example, to see the Ngwato people referred to as the ***Ba***ngwato, or the Kwena language referred to as ***Se***kwena.

**Tswana:** The Tswana are 1 of 3 major branches of the Sotho-Tswana group of Bantu-speaking tribes in southern Africa. The main Tswana ***merafe***, or tribes, are the Tawana, Ngwato, Kwena, Ngwaketse, Kgatla, Tlokwa, Malete, and Rolong. The historically most powerful are the Ngwato, based in Serowe; the Kwena, based in Molepolole; and the Ngwaketse, based in Kanye. Although the Ngwato are concentrated in Central District and the Tawana are concentrated in Northwest District, most of the remaining Tswana live in the south near Gaborone. However, each Tswana tribe traditionally controls its own district, a practice which dates back to the "tribal territories" assigned by Britain in 1933. Based on an earlier loose alliance in the aftermath of the ***difaqane*** (see p.3-4 of *History and Myth*) these Tswana states gained political prominence primarily because of their control over trading routes with the Cape Colony.

**Other Bantu-speaking Tribes:** Although the Tswana have been the politically dominant ethnicity in Botswana since the mid-19th century, many Batswana are members of other Sotho-Tswana tribes who speak other Bantu languages. Some of these tribes, such as the Kgalagadi of the Kalahari Desert, are so deeply assimilated into Tswana culture that they consider themselves as Tswana. Other tribes, such as the Kalanga, concentrated near Francistown, have sought to retain their own tribal identity even as they integrate into Botswana's national identity. Other numerically significant Bantu-speaking tribes include the Birwa, Herero, Mbanderu, Mbukushu, Subiya, Talaote, Tswapong, and Yeyi.

**Sarwa:** The Sarwa, as Khoe-San people are known in modern Botswana, are hunter-gatherers largely concentrated in southwest Botswana. Sarwa also are sometimes referred to with the outdated and pejorative term "Bushmen." Although the Sarwa speak as many as 10 distinct languages, the Tswana use the collective term "Sesarwa" for all languages spoken by the Sarwa. The presence of the Sarwa in Botswana predates that of Bantu-speaking tribes by thousands of years, and the two groups did not begin to intermingle until around 2,000 years ago (see p.1 of *History and Myth*). As a result, members of the two groups still have markedly distinct physical appearances, with the Sarwa generally having copper-colored skin, almond-shaped eyes, high cheekbones, and tufted, tightly curled hair. The Sarwa have been marginalized throughout history, as exemplified by the forced eviction in the early 1980s of 5,000 Sarwa from their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

**Expatriates:** The original expatriate population of Botswana consisted of about 3,000 Afrikaners and Englishmen who settled in Botswana during the colonial era. In recent years, increasing numbers of foreign nationals have settled in Botswana, attracted by rapid economic development. These foreign nationals come from Europe, North America, South Asia, and other parts of Africa, especially Ghana and Zambia.

## Social Relations

In traditional Tswana society, life is centered on the community, where the chief symbolizes unity. Tswana believe that the actions of one individual can affect the well-being of an entire community (see p.2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), and therefore people are expected to support family members without jobs, help nurture all children within the extended family (see p.3 of *Family and Kinship*), and provide shelter for traveling relatives. People are also expected to practice ***ipelegeng***, or self-help within a group (literally "carry yourselves"): by achieving personal educational or economic goals, an individual benefits the entire group. In general, the more an individual helps the community, the greater that individual's status.

**Personal Relationships:** Because families often reside in different households or are split between a town and a cattle post (see p.1 of *Family and Kinship*), visits to relatives are highly valued and conducted frequently, even without advance notice.

**Age and Gender:** Traditionally social, political, and economic roles were delegated based on age and gender (see p.1-3 of *Sex and Gender*). In contemporary society, there is no longer any formal division of labor by age, gender, or class, although deference is generally shown to males and elders, who are addressed by the respectful titles of ***Rra*** ("father") and ***Mma*** ("mother").

### Gift Giving and Visiting

Gifts are an inherent part of regular visits between urban and rural relatives. Urban family members may bring staple foods and household goods to their relatives at a cattle station, while rural family members may bring seasonal, home-grown food and crops to their relatives in the city. Before accepting a gift (usually with both hands), Batswana may press the hands together in front of the chest. Batswana present gifts either with both hands, or with the just the right hand with the left hand supporting the elbow.

## Status Indicators

**Ethnicity:** In the pre-colonial Tswana states, members of a chief's kin group enjoyed higher social status than non-members, a bias that continues to the present day through the inferior social and economic position of non-Tswana groups such as the Sarwa. Even political leaders have publicly referred to the Sarwa as primitive Stone Age people, implying that they are less than human.

**Wealth:** Botswana's reliance on diamond exports, coupled with an unskilled workforce unable to support new industries, has resulted in the second highest level of income inequality in the world (see p.1 of *Economics and Resources*). In local terms, 60% of Botswana's cattle, a traditional measure of wealth, are owned by just 10% of the population.

# 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

## Overview

Botswana is officially a secular state, with religious freedom guaranteed in the constitution. However, Christianity is ever-present in Botswana, with business meetings, government conferences, and official speeches often beginning with collective prayer.

Accurate statistics on religious affiliation are difficult to obtain due to the fluid nature of religious identity in Botswana. Many Batswana practice both a traditional religion and belong to a Christian church, or are members of an African Independent Church (AIC) and a major Christian denomination. Depending on the survey, between 50% and 83% of Batswana claim affiliation with a Christian church, while between 4% and 50% acknowledge practicing traditional religions. Estimates of the prevalence of traditional religion in Botswana vary widely, partly because many Batswana practice traditional religion alongside another religion. Across all surveys, slightly over 1% of the population acknowledges affiliation with Islam, and a few thousand individuals report practicing Hinduism or the Baha'i Faith (a monotheistic religion founded by Bahá'u'lláh in 19th-century Persia). Regardless of affiliation, their ideas about religion and spirituality infuse daily life for most people, shaping their relationships, self-perception, and worldview.

## Traditional Religion

**Historical:** Before missionaries arrived in 1812, Tswana religious beliefs centered on ***Modimo***, a creator god who was good, merciful, all-encompassing, and unknowable. If angered by human misdeeds, ***Modimo*** had the power to cause natural disasters, and because he was very remote, ***Modimo*** was rarely worshipped directly. Instead, the Tswana relied upon ***badimo***, or subordinate ancestral spirits, to serve as intermediaries.

Inhabitants of pre-colonial Botswana believed that the fate of both individuals and the community as a whole depended upon how individuals lived: when one member erred, the entire community would suffer. They also believed that ancestors governed the whole of society and that the living elders and chiefs were responsible for ensuring harmony in the social order by performing sacrifices and rituals, one of the most important of which was rainmaking. Within the Tswana states, healers and chiefs enjoyed mutually supportive authority to rule, control the natural order, and conduct rites-of-passage.

**Ritual Sacrifice**

When members of the Tlokwa (a Tswana tribe) fall ill, a traditional healer often recommends ***dithota***, a ritual sacrifice to the ancestors to restore harmony and health. To perform ***dithota***, the sick person brews beer, prepares food, and kills a sheep or cow, allowing the blood to flow from the head of the animal. He then leaves the beer and the animal's blood, stomach contents, and dung at an ancestor's grave; declaring his good intentions and asking the ancestor to make him better. A healer then mixes samples of all the items with traditional medicines and smears the resulting concoction on the body of the sick person. Once the mix has dried and been removed, community members share any remaining food and beer.

**Modern:** The religious beliefs underpinning modern traditional religion trace their roots to pre-colonial times. The central tenets of modern traditional religion are that the soul survives the body's death; kinship, concern, and meddling by ancestors continue after death; ancestors can be petitioned to bring rain, cure illness, and provide for a good harvest; ancestors are a channel of communication to God; and God is the greatest and most ancient of all ancestors.

Although most other religions practiced in Botswana denounce ancestor veneration, many of their members practice it privately,

and it is an integral part of many African Independent Church services (see “African Independent Churches” below).

For many Batswana, ancestral spirits remain prominent members of the community who care about the well-being of their descendants and wish to know about everyday life. As long as they are remembered and respected, the spirits act benevolently, but when people act wrongly, the ancestors may punish them. The term ***sepoko*** (plural ***dipoko***) refers to a spirit who troubles the living. In Gaborone, it is sometimes said that ***dipoko*** can manifest themselves in the bodies of animals particularly owls, cats, and dogs.

**Witchcraft:** Among the Tswana, ***boloi***, or witchcraft, involves the manipulation of special herbs and other materials by a ***moloi***, or witch (who can be either male or female) either for personal gain (to succeed in school, to make a business prosper, or to promote a career) or to harm someone. Batswana often blame bad fortune or illness on witchcraft, prompting them to seek diagnosis and treatment from a healer or prophet (see “African Independent Churches” below). Attempting to stop rain is considered the most extreme form of witchcraft because it is thought to threaten society as a whole. The media occasionally report ritual murders, ostensibly committed to harvest body parts needed for witchcraft rituals.

### The Introduction of Christianity

Although Christianity spread slowly after its arrival in the early 19th century, almost every major village had been exposed to its influence by the end of the century through the work of resident missionaries (see p.4-5 of *History and Myth*). Tswana chiefs generally welcomed Christian missionaries and used the new religious activities to advance their own political goals. Fearing the potentially divisive effects of religious pluralism, chiefs tended to allow only one missionary organization, usually the London Missionary Society (LMS), to work within their wards. As a result of these policies, the LMS effectively became the official church of the Tswana states.

However, many Tswana resisted evangelization by continuing to practice traditional religions or by combining those religions with Christianity to form new denominations. This resistance greatly displeased the colonial government, the LMS, and Christian Tswana chiefs, many of whom banned both traditional African religions and African-initiated Christian denominations. Despite these efforts, full religious freedom was restored following independence in 1966.

### Christianity Today

While the majority of Botswana identify as "Christian," this term is used in many different ways. For most Batswana, Christianity is a mix of mainline Christian theology (see below) and pre-colonial beliefs and practices concerning ***Modimo*** and ancestor veneration. Christian identity is often a mark of status and matter of pride, and many Batswana carry Bibles or wear uniforms and pins to signify their church membership.

**Mainline Churches:** Mainline churches are those that were established by European and North American missionaries (see p.4-5 of *History and Myth*). Many today have strong links with South Africa, and one of the largest is the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (formerly the LMS). In addition, the Catholic Church remains very active, as do smaller numbers of Methodist, Quaker, Lutheran, Mennonite, Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, and Dutch Reformed churches. Since the mid-1990s, mainline churches have been losing significant numbers to African Independent Churches, the fastest growing form of Christianity in Botswana.

**African Independent Churches:** Most African Independent Churches (AICs) were started by southern Africans who left mainline churches in the early 20th century in a concerted effort to "de-colonialize" Christianity. AIC founders sought to integrate Christian teachings with healing, ancestor veneration, and other traditional practices prohibited by missionaries. Instead of depicting God as the "white father" in heaven, these churches worship God as ***Modimo***.

Fearing AIC members would provide added support to the Bechuanaland People's Party (BPP), its nationalist political agenda, and anti-apartheid stance (see p.7 of *History and Myth*); the colonial government began persecuting them in the 1930s. Even after independence, fear of extremism and sensitive relations with South Africa motivated continued surveillance of the AICs.

In modern AIC churches, prophets and traditional healers use divination to guide members through everyday difficulties, and many maintain traditional ***diagelo***, or healing clinics, for HIV/AIDS patients (see p.3 of *Sustenance and Health*). Prominent examples of AIC churches are the Spiritual Healing Church and the Zion Christian Church. Smaller AICs abound, especially in rural areas. Many more Batswana belong to AICs than to mainline churches.

**Charismatic Churches:** Charismatic churches encompass evangelical, Pentecostal, and the so-called "churches of the spirit." Relative latecomers to Botswana, they have sprung up primarily in urban areas and grown rapidly in the last 10 years, now representing between 20-25% of Christians. These churches stress being born again, evangelism, and healing through the laying-on of hands and prayer. Consistent with such churches throughout sub-Saharan Africa, they preach the gospel of wealth, emphasizing material rewards for the faithful.

**Religious Response to HIV/AIDS**

As a result of the HIV/AIDS crisis (see p.3-4 of *Sustenance and Health*), there has been rapid expansion of Western medicine into rural areas. However, many Batswana turn to religion in search of alternatives or supplements to Western treatment. Prophets, for example, perform ancestral cleansing ceremonies and communicate with ***badimo*** in order to heal what Western medicine cannot. Growing numbers of roadside stands advertise traditional medicines, and funeral practices have become more elaborate in an attempt to appease the ancestral spirits who might be responsible for the illness – resulting in "impoverishment by funeral" for some working-class families.

# 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP



## Overview

The HIV/AIDS epidemic (see p.3-4 of *Sustenance and Health*) is gradually eroding the values at the heart of Botswana's kinship systems: reciprocity, respect for elders, and aid for the vulnerable. The disintegration of extended families – and the social safety net that they provide – is forcing many families deeper into poverty. The traditional foster system, in which aunts and uncles act as substitute caregivers for needy children, is threatened both by the growing number of orphans and by the fact that uncles and aunts are also falling ill, forcing grandparents to take responsibility for several generations of family members.

## Family and Residence

The most traditional settlements in Botswana are large villages in which each extended family occupies a compound composed of a ***lolwapa***, or open courtyard, surrounded by ***rondavels***, or round, thatched-roof houses made from mud and cow manure. The clay walls which enclose the ***lolwapa*** and connect the ***rondavels*** are often molded, decorated, or painted. Since these villages are usually far away from ***mashimo*** (village farmlands) and ***meraka*** (cattle posts), men often live in temporary shelters for long periods of time while tending to crops and livestock.

Today, family and living arrangements in Botswana are in transition. Although some families still conform to the traditional pattern of seasonal migration between ancestral villages and remote cattle posts, many Batswana have settled permanently in cities, intensifying the economic and social gaps between rural and urban Batswana.

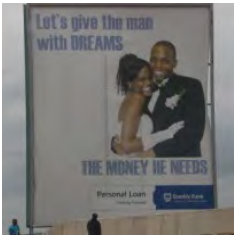
## Authority within the Family

In the traditional Tswana kinship system, elder males wielded authority in their role as family and lineage heads, and society was divided broadly into "generations" of men and women who underwent initiation together (see "Initiation Rituals" below).

In contemporary society, this patrilineal system is changing as household composition shifts in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and economic development (see p.4 of *Economics and Resources*). Of note, approximately 48% of households in Botswana are now headed by women who, in urban areas, have assumed a greater role in family decision-making as they increasingly enter the labor market. Women in rural areas now head the majority of households with the help of extensive kin networks (see p.1 of *Sex and Gender*).

### Dating

Traditionally, young Batswana adults met potential romantic partners through church and school, a system which has scarcely changed in rural areas. However, Batswana youth in urban areas have become much more social and now meet potential romantic partners in a variety of contexts, including night clubs and movie theaters. Dating and informal relationships are more common, even among young teenagers.




### Marriage

**Traditional:** In traditional Tswana society, teen marriages were common, cohabitation was rare, and childbearing out-of-wedlock was a punishable offense. The groom's family paid a bride price (***bogadi*** or ***lobola***) in order to compensate the bride's family for the loss of her labor. Newly married couples settled with or near the groom's parents, who exercised significant control over the new couple: the groom's parents were entitled to distribute their son's earnings at will, and the daughter-in-law was subordinate to the mother-in-law. Wealthy men occasionally had more than one wife (a practice known as polygyny), although the moral admonitions of Christian missionaries led many Tswana chiefs to abolish polygyny (see p.4-5 of *History and Myth*).

**Modern:** Marriage rates have been declining for decades. Only about 40% of Batswana have been married, and only half of those are currently married. Despite these low percentages, marriage remains a highly regarded institution and the only means for some women to secure an inheritance for their

children and earn respect in the community. Some women choose not to marry in order to secure custody of their children, while others fear the risk of contracting HIV from an unfaithful husband. Since illegitimate children have no legal relationship to the father or his family, these children are largely the responsibility of the mother and her extended family. Therefore, many children do not receive an inheritance.

Of note, Botswana has the highest extramarital fertility rate in sub-Saharan Africa. While the rate has declined in recent years, the social value of fertility remains very high, and Batswana of both sexes commonly expect to have children with multiple partners (see "Children" below).

### Weddings

Despite low marriage rates, weddings remain significant celebratory events performed under both common and customary law (see p.3 of *Political and Social Relations*) and usually include two or more days of eating, drinking, dancing, and speechmaking.

### Children

Women give birth with the help of both Western-style healthcare facilities and traditional midwives and healers. Following birth, the mother and child both observe ***botsetsi***, a period of confinement which lasts up to three months. During *botsetsi*, mother and child stay in near constant physical contact while one of the grandmothers cares for the mother and provides her with the best food available. This custom is intended to strengthen bonds between mother and child and to promote intergenerational bonding.

**Orphans:** Over 20% of all children in Botswana are orphans, the majority due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Most orphans are cared for by their mother's extended family in large households dependent on a few wage earners. This arrangement places severe stress on the household and often forces orphans to drop out of school to undertake wage labor. When family safety nets no longer function efficiently, neither communities nor the national government can provide adequate assistance.

### Initiation Rituals

In traditional Tswana society, boys and girls were initiated into society at puberty through elaborate rituals known as ***bogwera*** for boys and ***bojale*** for girls. Bojale, for example, tried to foster ***seriti***, a sense of dignity, among young women with symbolic ceremonies and community-wide feasting and dancing.

The popularity of initiation rituals has declined in recent years due to a sense that they no longer serve a relevant purpose: young Batswana generally prefer ***sesha***, or modern times, and formal sex education has removed much of the mystery from bodily functions and sexuality. However, one Tswana tribe, the Kgatla, has revived initiation ceremonies in recent years due to concerns about social problems among the youth population.

### Death and Funerals

During funerals, friends and relatives reflect upon the circumstances of their loved one's death and reassess their relationships with each other. In particular, deaths of young people due to HIV/AIDS have the potential to cause family crises. For example, if parents suspect that their deceased son's wife caused his death by behaving promiscuously, the resulting emotions may rupture already fragile family ties.

#### Hot Blood and Widowhood

Batswana believe that husbands and wives become "of one blood" once they have had children together. The death of one spouse is said to make the blood of the other "hot." Hot blood is believed to be both dangerous and contagious, and anyone who has sex with a widow or widower during the year of mourning following his or her spouse's death will become infected with hot blood and contract ***boswagadi***, an ostensibly fatal disease. In order to warn others of their hot blood, mourning widows in Gaborone wear black dresses, shawls, and headscarves – a custom which many women lament because it isolates them socially and physically. Similarly, widowers wear black hats and pin pieces of black cloth to their shirts.

# 5. SEX AND GENDER

## Overview

Although Botswana has traditionally been a patriarchal (male-dominated) society, the government has adopted important gender equality legislation in recent years. However, despite better access to education and wage labor, women are still more likely than men to be unemployed or underpaid. In addition, women still face barriers to entering national politics.

## Gender Roles and Work

Across tribes in Botswana, the traditional division of labor in rural areas required men to hunt while women farmed, built houses, and performed domestic duties. Although Tswana women were generally prevented from participating in political affairs, Sarwa women were actively involved.

In the much more urbanized society of modern Botswana, women comprise about 48% of all workers in the cash economy, although they generally are confined to roles in the informal market such as small-scale entrepreneurship, domestic servitude, or sometimes prostitution.

In Botswana, the labor force participation rate among females was 69% and among males was 60% for 2023. Women also represented 53% of those employed in senior and middle management positions in 2023. Botswana's constitution guarantees universal suffrage, and women compete for political office. Although a few women have been appointed to prominent ministerial positions, men still dominate the House of Chiefs, the National Assembly, and ***kgotla***, or tribal councils.

## Gender Roles within the Family

Having become increasingly common in Botswana (see p.2 of *Family and Kinship*), female-headed households face several unique challenges resulting from broader disadvantages. Because women are generally more likely to be unemployed or

underpaid, female-headed households earn an average of 18% less than male-headed households. Furthermore, women face a social expectation that they will continue to perform domestic duties and provide for relatives in need even if they are the primary breadwinner. Despite these challenges, research has shown that female-headed households generally have a more equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities.

### Gender and the Law

Although Botswana's constitution bans discrimination based on sex, this ban does not apply to family matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance due to Botswana's dual legal system in which customary law exists alongside common law (see p.3 of *Political and Social Relations*). Although recent legislation has bolstered the legal standing of women under common law, especially with regard to inheritance and custody rights, many family and property disputes still are decided according to customary law, which heavily favors men.

In 2020, President Masisi reportedly passed a law that allows married women to be eligible to own land independent of their husbands. The new law is an amendment to Botswana's Land Policy of 2015 which prevented married women, widows and orphans from inheriting land or acquiring new land entirely. Historically, land that belonged to husbands followed patriarchal traditions of inheritance. Customary law defined women as legal minors, which meant that women needed spousal consent to buy and sell property or to enter into contracts. In addition, customary law requires that mothers relinquish custody of their children to paternal relatives upon divorce or death of the husband.

Despite the enduring popularity of customary law, inheritance patterns in Botswana seem to be growing more

equitable in practice. Rather than simply leaving all assets to the eldest son, most parents now divide them equally between all children, and even occasionally favor daughters who have helped to generate income for the family. In addition, daughters who maintain parental assets and care for their parents in old age now have recourse to duty-beneficiary claims which were once limited to sons.

### Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women is common in Botswana and occurs most often in the home: recent United Nations data suggests that 67% of women have experienced physical or sexual abuse at least once in their lives. Although gender-based violence has been a crime since 2008, most perpetrators are never prosecuted or convicted. The ineffectiveness of this law may be due to attitudes shaped by customary law, under which men have the right to "chastise" their wives.

### Sex and Procreation

Most Batswana consider sexual relations a normal part of life, and procreation remains a cultural priority across all tribes. For men, a large part of masculinity is tied to fathering children, especially with several different women (see p.3-4 of *Family and Kinship*). For women, adulthood is increasingly tied to childbirth rather than marriage. The perception of infertility can lower an individual's social status, and women who are thought to be infertile are often marginalized.

### Homosexuality

Both male and female same-sex relations have been legal in Botswana since 11 June 2019 after a unanimous ruling by the High Court of Botswana. However, same-sex couples have no legal recognition, whether in the form of marriage or civil unions.

# 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

**Languages**

Although the government of Botswana actively promotes the Setswana language, Botswana is a linguistically diverse country with at least 28 different languages. Half of them belong to the Bantu branch of the Niger-Congo language family, which is commonly spoken throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Another 12 of Botswana's languages belong to the Khoe-San language family, a group which includes all of the native, non-Bantu languages spoken in southern Africa.

The remaining two languages, Afrikaans and English, were introduced to southern Africa by Europeans during the colonial era. Nearly all languages spoken in Botswana are also spoken in neighboring countries, a reflection of extensive cultural diffusion and assimilation resulting from constant movement of people throughout the region (see p.3 of *History and Myth*).

**Setswana:** Approximately 82% of the population speaks Setswana, a member of the Bantu branch and the national language of Botswana. Although it is primarily associated with the Tswana tribes, members of many other tribes also speak Setswana. In addition, Setswana is an official language in South Africa, home to 4.1 million Setswana speakers – over twice the number in Botswana. Setswana owes its prominence to the historical power of the Tswana tribes (see p.3 of *History and Myth* and p.9 of *Political and Social Relations*), which have dominated the politics of independent Botswana.

Tswana politicians have promoted Setswana as a tool for national unity by broadcasting state-run media exclusively in Setswana (and English) and requiring students to study Setswana (see p.4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Similarly, its use is explicitly encouraged to communicate the country's socio-cultural values. Setswana also benefits from its popularity as a common language among ethnic groups with different native languages.

**Kalanga:** About 7.4% of the population speaks Kalanga, a Bantu language primarily associated with the Kalanga tribe. While over 80% of Kalanga-speakers live in Zimbabwe, those living in Botswana are concentrated near the Zimbabwean border in Northeast and Central districts. Although the Kalanga tribe has been ruled by other groups for the last 600 years, many of these rulers have ultimately intermarried with members of the Kalanga tribe and assimilated its customs, which has help to preserve the Kalanga language.

**Other Bantu Languages:**
Although there are 12 additional Bantu languages spoken in Botswana, none of them is used by more than 2.5% of the population. Bantu languages as a whole are characterized by the use of common prefixes to differentiate between noun classes. One example is the word "Bantu" itself: since ***mu-*** denotes singular human nouns, and ***ba-*** denotes plural human nouns, the word ***muntu***, or person, becomes ***bantu***, or people.

However, all of the Bantu languages have their own unique linguistic features. For example, the Kgalagadi and Yeyi languages have incorporated, on a smaller scale, the pronunciation elements present in Khoe-San languages (see textbox below), suggesting long and peaceful coexistence between these groups.

**Khoe-San:** Mainly spoken by the Sarwa, Khoe-San languages form a broad and largely artificial category which includes much cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Among the 2.4% of the population which speaks a Khoe-San language, the most popular languages are Naro (8,000), Shua (2,000), Ju|'hoan (5,000), and !Xóõ (2,000) (the accent marks indicate tongue clicks – see "Clicking Sounds in Ju|'hoan" below).

Naro and Shua were traditionally spoken by Khoe herders and farmers in the Kalahari Desert, while Ju|'hoan and !Xóõ were traditionally spoken by nomadic hunter-gatherers. Although Setswana is displacing Khoe-San languages, the Nama

language of the Khoe-San family is alive and well in Namibia, where it is spoken by about 279,000 people.

**English:** Although English is the official language used for business, government, and education, only about 2.8% of the population speaks English in the home. It is taught as a required subject beginning in primary school (see p.4 of *Learning and Knowledge*), and knowledge of both English and Setswana is effectively a prerequisite for many jobs. About 40% of Batswana can read and write English.

### Clicking Sounds in Ju|'hoan

Khoe-San is the world's only language family which uses tongue clicks to form some consonants. These tongue clicks are an effective means of transmitting sounds over long distances, particularly in flat areas, and as far as 2 miles away. The following characters are used to denote various clicking sounds in the Ju|'hoan language:

- **|** denotes a sucking sound made by clicking the tongue just behind the front teeth.
- **||** denotes a clucking sound similar to the type used to urge on a horse.
- **!** denotes a popping sound made by pulling the tongue down sharply from the roof of the mouth.
- **(** denotes a popping sound made by lightly pulling the tongue away from the spot just above the back of the front teeth.

## Communication Style

Batswana generally communicate in an indirect, non-confrontational style which includes only a few gestures and facial expressions. Speaking quietly is common, and extended silences are not seen as awkward or problematic. Batswana generally believe worthwhile relationships take time to cultivate and can be slow in fostering new acquaintances. They typically ignore conflict, and if a person feels wronged, he simply avoids

the offender. Similarly, they make decisions carefully, deliberating until a consensus is reached.

### Greetings

Greetings are very important in Botswana, and it is considered extremely rude to walk by an acquaintance without greeting him. The most common form of greeting is the handshake, which in Botswana involves light contact with palms and fingertips. When shaking hands with an elder or superior, it is respectful to grasp the right elbow with the left hand and to bow the head slightly.

Younger people should always wait for the elder or superior to initiate a greeting or handshake. Batswana often hold hands for the duration of their first conversation with a new acquaintance. Although greetings between Batswana and foreign nationals will almost certainly follow this approach, greetings among Batswana themselves vary by ethnic group.

The standard formal Setswana greeting is *Dumêla, Rra/Mma, O tsogile jang?* ("Greetings, sir/madam, how did you wake?"), and the response is *Ke tsogile sentle* ("I awoke well"). Less formal greetings are common among children, friends, and intimates, for whom the standard greeting is *O kae?* ("How are you?"), and the standard response is *Ke teng* ("I am here," which means "Fine" in this context).

### Titles

When addressing elders, superiors, or new acquaintances, Batswana use formal modes of address such as *Rra* ("sir"), *Mma* ("madam"), and Mr. or Mrs. followed by the last name. If applicable, titles such as *Director* or *Captain* are also used. When an individual requests or a relationship is well established, Batswana are comfortable with less formality.

### Conversational Topics

**Safe:** Batswana usually limit discussions to uncontroversial, general interest topics such as the weather when speaking with

a person they do not know well. In general, foreign nationals should try to confine their conversations to these sorts of topics. Highly educated Batswana may be able to discuss a broader range of topics, such as their educational background and countries to which they have travelled.

**Handle with Care:** Although foreign nationals are often encouraged to discuss their hometown and family, it is not always appropriate to ask Batswana the same questions in return. For example, many less educated Batswana remain unmarried, and asking about their marital status can lead to an awkward situation – it is generally safer to ask whether they have children.

When Batswana do talk about their hometown or family, they generally give vague responses such as "up the road." Such responses are entirely acceptable, and foreign nationals should not probe further.

**Taboo:** Since tribal relations can be a sensitive subject in Botswana, foreign nationals should avoid asking Batswana about their tribal affiliations. Similarly, personal relationships or sexual orientation are topics which are usually appropriate only in personal and private relationships.

### Gestures

Batswana rotate the wrist with fingers outstretched or pointing down to indicate "no thanks," or that there is no more of something. Batswana extend the right arm and wave the right hand to hail a vehicle while hitchhiking.

Just as in America, it is extremely rude to show someone the middle finger, and it is rude to wave the index finger. It is impolite to pass between people having a conversation – Batswana will duck below the level of the conversation and say *Intshwarele* ("Excuse me") if an alternate path is not available.

### Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

## Useful Translations

| English | Setswana |
|---|---|
| **Note:** The character *ê* is pronounced like *e* in the English word *there*. | |
| Do you speak English? | A o bua Sekgoa? |
| Hello/Good day | Dumêla |
| Good day, ladies and gentlemen | Dumêlang borra le bomma |
| How are you? (*to an individual)* | O tsogile jang? |
| How are you? (*to a group*) | Le tsogile jang? |
| I am well | Ke tsogile sentle |
| What is your name? | Leina la gago ke mang? |
| My name is ___ | Leina lame ke ___ |
| Where are you from? | O tswa kae? |
| I am from ___ | Ke tswa kwa ___ |
| Yes (Sir/Madam) | Ee (Rra/Mma) |
| No (Sir/Madam) | Nnyaa (Rra/Mma) |
| No problem | Go gona mathata |
| Goodbye | Go siame |
| Goodbye/Go well (*when staying*) | Tsamaya sentle |
| Goodbye/Stay well (*when leaving*) | Sala sentle |
| Please | Tswêê-tswêê |
| Thank you | Ke itumetse |
| Sorry/Forgive me | Intshwarele |
| Yesterday | Maabane |
| Today | Gompieno |
| Tomorrow | Kamoso |
| Who? | Mang? |
| What/Which? | Eng? |
| When? | Leng? |
| Where? | Kae? |
| Why? | Reng? |
| How? | Jang? |
| How much is it? | Ke bokae? |
| What do you want? | O batla eng? |
| Help me | Nthuse |
| Please say again | Bua gape |
| I do not understand | Ga ke tlhaloganye |

# 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

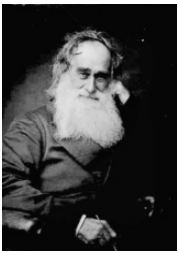
### Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 88.5%
- Male: 88%
- Female: 88.9% (2015 estimate)

### Traditional Education

Although traditional education systems in Botswana varied by tribe and region, for the most part they were intended to integrate young adults into society. These systems were also designed to teach children the intellectual, moral, and practical skills needed to thrive in their physical and social environment. Family elders were primarily responsible for teaching children, focusing on both theoretical and practical lessons in areas such as domestic work, kinship duties, politics, and survival skills. Similarly, elders used parables to illustrate moral principles and riddles to provide intellectual challenges.

**Initiation Schools:** After reaching puberty, young adults traditionally attended initiation schools, where they studied for 3 months under an instructor selected by elders. All initiation schools were intended to foster unity within the tribe, and the instruction they provided differed sharply for boys and girls. The male curriculum included intensive physical training and artistic instruction alongside lessons about familial, political, and religious obligations. Less is known about the female curriculum, as it was off-limits to outsiders, but it generally involved intricate and symbolic rituals of song, dance, and movement which instructed young women about parenting skills and social expectations (see p.4 of *Family and Kinship*).



### Introduction of Formal Education

Western-style formal education was first introduced during the mid-19th century with the arrival of Robert Moffat and other missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) (see p.4-5 of *History and Myth*), who saw themselves as leading Batswana from the "darkness" of their pre-contact life into the "light" of civilization and the gospel. Initially, the education provided

in mission schools was strictly religious, giving only rudimentary instruction in reading and arithmetic. Gradually, however, missionaries broadened the curriculum of mission schools to cultivate educated Africans who could spread Christianity among their peers. The British government also provided limited funding to mission schools on the condition that they produce docile and literate Africans who could work in the colonial administration.

Instructors openly disparaged indigenous customs and values and emphasized that Europe was the true seat of civilization. Similarly, racism and inequality were an integral part of mission schools which were rigidly tiered in favor of the dominant Tswana tribes over other ethnic groups. This strategy ultimately backfired on the British, as the well-educated Tswana elite eventually recognized the injustice of colonial politics and demanded political reform. By the 1930s, the British had begun to reform the education system at the insistence of both missionaries and Batswana and further expanded access to education from 1945 to 1965, although improvements were largely confined to basic education.

### Education after Independence

Botswana was one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world when it gained its independence in 1966. There were only two secondary schools in the entire country, and most Batswana could not afford to send their children abroad for further education. Botswana's leaders knew that economic growth required an educated workforce, but there simply was not enough money in the budget to expand schooling. However, this situation changed dramatically with the discovery of diamonds in 1967, which boosted tax revenues enough to fund massive government investment programs in infrastructure, health, and education.

### Education in Modern Botswana

Modern Batswana view education very similarly to the early LMS missionaries: education can lead from the darkness of ignorance

into the light of knowledge. For many Batswana, education provides relief from agricultural wage labor and entry into the global knowledge economy.

The Botswana government provides universal access to 10 years of basic education, which includes 7 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school. Admittance into the subsequent 2 years of senior secondary school is not guaranteed, however, and is actually very difficult to achieve. There are only about 32 public senior secondary schools in Botswana, which presently have room for only about 80% of Botswana's junior secondary school graduates.

During the economic boom of the 1980s, the government abolished school fees at all levels. However, budgetary pressures forced the government to reinstate secondary school fees in 2006. These fees, plus the cost of required uniforms, make education unaffordable for some families.

Tertiary education in Botswana is provided mainly by the University of Botswana and the Francistown College of Technical and Vocational Education. Botswana International University of Science and Technology, in the eastern city of Palapye, began enrolling students in 2011 and offers both undergraduate and graduate level programs.

**Educational Goals: *Kagisano* and *Botho***

Botswana's 1977 National Commission on Education report stated that one of education's most important goals was the achievement of ***kagisano***, or social harmony. To reach this goal, education should strive to develop the national principles of democracy, development, self-reliance, and unity. The report's update in 1997, *Vision 2016: Towards Prosperity for All,* added the concept of ***botho*** as a further educational goal. The word ***botho*** is used to describe a courteous, disciplined, well-mannered, and well-rounded person who actively strives to realize his or her potential both as an individual and as a part of his or her community.

### Multilingual Education

For the Botswana government, access to basic education is a fundamental human right, and the role of education is to develop a society that promotes unity while respecting diverse cultures and languages. In practice, however, the government's policies promote a singular Tswana linguistic and cultural identity to the detriment of other traditions and languages.

In education, this favoritism has resulted in a "transitional bilingual" school system, in which the language of instruction for the first 2 to 4 years of primary school is Setswana, after which Setswana becomes a secondary subject and English becomes the language of instruction. This system is very difficult for the 15% of Botswana's population whose first language is neither Setswana nor English (see p.1-3 of *Language and Communication*). Although the government has recently identified 6 minority languages for potential use as languages of instruction, debate still surrounds both the usefulness of such a program and the costs of developing standardized writing systems, curricula, and teaching materials.

### Literacy Programs

Between 1981 and 2015, Botswana's literacy rate increased from 34% to 88.5%, a remarkable jump due not only to improved primary and secondary education but also to government-funded adult literacy programs in Setswana and English. Some literacy classes incorporate Christian rituals in order to enhance the learning process, while the members of other classes wear uniforms to signify their group membership.

### HIV/AIDS Education

Since 1986 Botswana has responded to the spread of HIV/AIDS by implementing a plan which includes both formal and informal education. Information about contraception and HIV/AIDS is now part of the curriculum in junior secondary school, and the government has also created a broader "ABC" public education campaign, which advises Batswana to "Abstain, Be faithful, and use Condoms."

# 8. TIME AND SPACE

## Overview

In both business and social contexts, Batswana tend to be reserved with people they do not know. However, they are generally willing to build a relationship with individuals who display respect, humility, and an interest in Botswana culture.

## Personal Space

The amount of personal space that Batswana expect varies by ethnicity, region, and familiarity. When speaking with new acquaintances, Batswana usually maintain about the same distance as Americans, although they stand closer to family and close friends, maintaining roughly an arm's length of personal space.

**Touching:** Conversational touching, particularly in public, is rare in Botswana. Although women may touch one another during conversation, men will generally avoid touching either gender. However, close friends will frequently touch one another when conversing.

**Eye Contact:** For Batswana, direct eye contact demonstrates trustworthiness, particularly within professional contexts. However, Batswana may not establish direct eye contact at the very beginning of a conversation nor sustain it once initiated.

## Time and Work

The work week in Botswana extends from Monday through Friday with office hours from 7:30am-4:30pm. Most office employees do not work on weekends or public holidays unless they have to meet an urgent deadline and will expect overtime pay. Grocery stores such as Pick n Pay are often open from 9:00am-9:00pm on weekdays and 8:00am-6:00pm on weekends and public holidays.

**Punctuality and Deadlines:** Although foreign nationals should strive to be punctual, Batswana may not place as strong an emphasis on deadlines and punctuality as Americans. Although Batswana generally expect deadlines to be met, there is some degree of flexibility in practice, especially when initially determining deadlines.

**Absenteeism:** Batswana occasionally miss work for as long as one week to attend a funeral for a relative, friend, colleague, or acquaintance. This practice is both common and appropriate in Botswana.

**Public Holidays**

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January 2: Public Holiday
- March – April: Good Friday
- Saturday after Good Friday: Public Holiday
- March – April: Easter Monday
- May 1: Labor Day
- May 13: Ascension Day
- July 1: Sir Seretse Khama Day
- 3rd Monday in July: President's Day
- Tuesday after President's Day: Public Holiday
- September 30: Botswana Day
- October 1: Public Holiday
- December 25: Christmas Day
- December 26: Boxing Day
- December 27: Public Holiday

**Negotiations:** Batswana prefer to build relationships prior to conducting business so that the needs of both sides are well understood and mutually beneficial outcomes are easier to achieve. This approach can make negotiation a time-consuming process. Consequently, foreign nationals are advised to demonstrate patience, humility, and an interest in Botswana culture in order to foster relationships.

# 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

**Overview**
The clothing, games, music, and artwork of Botswana demonstrate how people integrate new customs while still retaining and celebrating traditional styles.

**Dress**
Nearly all Batswana dress in conservative Western clothing, although the level of formality varies by location (rural vs. urban) and occasion (formal vs. casual). Since untidy clothing suggests that the wearer is poor or of low social status, Batswana generally keep their clothes neat at all times.

**Men:** Men generally wear a suit and tie to work. In off-hours, or in more casual workplaces, they wear a shirt or t-shirt with trousers or jeans. Respectable men do not usually wear shorts outside of safari camps in the bush; therefore, male foreign nationals should plan to wear long pants in villages and cities.

**Women:** Women generally wear a blouse with a dress, knee-length skirt, culottes, or trousers to work. This type of outfit is also common and appropriate for off-hours. Female foreign nationals should avoid wearing revealing clothing because it implies that the wearer is sexually promiscuous or otherwise lacks honorable character.

**Pre-Colonial Dress:** Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, the tribes of Botswana made clothing from animal skins or furs. Men wore a basic outfit consisting of a ***tshega***, or loin cloth, and a ***kaross***, or cloak, usually worn with a cap, sandals, strings of beads, and armbands made of grass or copper wire.

Women wore a similar outfit consisting of a ***khiba***, or apron, and a ***mosese***, or skirt, worn under a ***kaross***. Both men and women wore a variety of anklets, bangles, beads, and bracelets intended to indicate social status and ward off afflictions such as

jealousy, sickness, and harm. In addition, Batswana covered themselves with reddish grease made of animal fat and mineral pigments to protect their skin from the harsh sunshine and winds of the Kalahari.

With the arrival of British missionaries in the mid-19th century (see p.4-5 of *History and Myth*), Batswana began to mix traditional garments with simple Western styles. Over time, Western attire eventually became more widespread and eventually dark- patterned cloth replaced animal hides. This mingling of styles resulted in ***mateitshe*** whereby traditional styles are worn on special occasions in modern Batswana.

### Sports and Games

**Soccer:** While soccer is the most popular sport in Botswana, the national team, nicknamed "the Zebras," has not performed well in international competitions primarily due to Botswana's small population and the need for players to work day jobs.

Nonetheless, the Zebras remain popular with fans: tickets are usually sold out a week before games, where fans clad in the national colors beat drums and blow horns in support of their team.

**Board Games:** Tracing its roots to ancient Egypt, the board game ***morabaraba*** (known throughout other African societies as ***wari***, ***aware***, ***ayo***, and ***mancala***) consists of 2 players trying to eliminate their opponent's pebbles on a "board" of 48 holes dug into the ground. In ***mohele***, another ancient African board game, 2 players try to capture each other's "cows" (pebbles or beans) by trapping them at the intersection points on a board consisting of 3 concentric squares overlain with a "+" sign.

**Animals:** Hunting is very popular at remote cattle posts, where hunters use slingshots to kill birds and rabbits. Some Batswana also enjoy dog fighting, horse racing, and donkey riding.

## Music

**Folk Music:** The traditional music of Botswana is characterized by a repetitive, call-and-response format in which a soloist sings a stanza and a chorus responds. This sort of music typically relies upon rhythmic hand-clapping or traditional stringed instruments to accompany singers. The most common instruments are the ***segankuru*** or ***segaba*** (one-stringed fiddle) and the ***setinkane*** (thumb piano). Batswana have traditional songs for nearly every occasion, from going to war to coaxing an infant to sleep. While traditional music declined in response to post-independence integration policies (see p.8-9 of *History and Myth*), it has reemerged since the 1980s as popular artists like Olebile "Maxy" Sedumedi have brought renewed attention to traditional music, often by mixing it with modern styles.

**Popular Music:** Many of today's music styles in Botswana are imported from South Africa, Europe, and the US. The most popular is ***gumba-gumba*** ("party-party"), which mixes traditional Tswana and Zulu music with American-style jazz. Another popular style is ***kwaito***, which blends African styles from the 1920s and 1950s with hip-hop and jazz in order evoke the urban South African townships in which it was born. The most famous *kwaito* artist in Botswana is Odirile "Vee" Sento, who has popularized the blending of *kwaito* with ***kwasa-kwasa***, an African version of the rumba which originated in Zaire in the 1980s and is distinguished by intricate guitar solos and accelerating tempos. Botswana is also home to a thriving hip-hop scene, popularized by groups like the Wizards and the television show *Strictly Hip Hop*, which is hosted by Botswana hip-hop artists Slim and Draztik.

## Dance

There are a wide variety of dances associated with Botswana's different tribes and regions. The Kweneng district is known for ***phatisi***, a dance which involves vigorous foot stomping, while Ghanzi and Kgalagadi districts perform a highly athletic routine, ***tsutsube***, in which dancers act out events such as men going

on a hunt. Among the Ngwaketse a processional dance, ***setapa***, is used to celebrate weddings and the harvest season, while Kalanga women are known for ***hosanna***, a rain dance to please ***Mwali*** (God). The Mbukushu perform ***diboki*** to celebrate a girl's reaching puberty, ***diware*** to pray for healing, and ***thiwinji*** to give thanks for harvest. Batswana have found a number of creative ways to unify these diverse traditions. ***Borankana***, for example, is a dance popular throughout Botswana which is derived from many different regional and tribal dances.

### Theater

The oldest and most important public theater in Botswana is a 450-seat cultural center in Gaborone known as ***Maitisong***, a Setswana word which refers to a place where people gather in the evening to converse, socialize, and play games. Every spring, Maitisong hosts the Maitisong Festival, which brings performances showcasing genres as diverse as opera and Afro-Pop to the people of Gaborone.

### Beauty Pageants

For a country with a small population, Botswana has enjoyed an impressive degree of success in international beauty pageants. The most notable example is Mpule Kwelagobe, who was crowned Miss Universe in 1999. Even on a small scale, beauty pageants are a favored form of weekend entertainment and typically spotlight young females of various ages.

### Performers and HIV/AIDS

Many Botswana performers participate in campaigns to educate the public about HIV/AIDS. These performers range from Mogwana, a traditional dance group, and Socca Moruakgomo, a popular jazz musician, to Johnny Kobedi, a wisecracking street performer, and Malebogo Marumoagae, the Miss Botswana winner of 2006.

### Literature

Some of the earliest published works in Botswana belonged to a genre of European travel literature which romanticized the life

of a swashbuckling European explorer. In the 20th century, Sol Plaatje, a Setswana-speaking South African, translated several Shakespearean plays into Setswana, while also translating collections of Tswana folklore into English. Bessie Head, a South African immigrant who settled in Serowe, explored the difficulties of life in post-colonial Africa through a series of internationally acclaimed novels. More recently, Unity Dow, a judge best known for upholding the Sarwa's right to inhabit the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (see p.10 of *Political and Social Relations*), gained recognition for her novels which explore HIV/AIDS, child protection, and violence against women.

Alexander McCall Smith, a Scottish lawyer born in Zimbabwe, authored *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, an acclaimed series of 12 novels which chronicle the adventures of Mma Precious Ramotswe, a detective based in Gaborone. This literary work was produced into a TV series on *Showtime*.

### Arts and Crafts

**Basketry:** Batswana produce many different shapes and sizes of baskets which accommodate a variety of potential uses, including grain storage, beer filtration, and the display of market goods. Most baskets are produced from the fibrous fronds of the ***mokola***, or "vegetable ivory" palm tree, which are cut, boiled, and stored in water until they are wrapped around a strong core of palm fiber. Batswana then create patterns on the baskets with brown dyes derived from roots and tree bark.

**Pottery:** For almost 2,000 years, Batswana have molded clay pots primarily for storing food and water in the home. The simplicity of Botswana pottery belies the complex process of preparing the clay, molding it symmetrically, baking it at the right temperature for the correct amount of time, polishing it with a smooth stone, and then decorating the finished item with ochre and graphite. The market for clay pottery has been severely diminished by the introduction of mass-produced plastic and metal vessels, which are both cheaper and more durable.

**Beadwork:** Batswana have been making beads out of ostrich eggshells for more than 10,000 years. These beads are hewn with a hammer from small, angular ostrich shell fragments and then drilled through the middle and strung onto a long sinew or string. Over many years of wear, these strings of beads develop a distinct gloss due to the constant friction of rubbing against one another.

## Special Occasions

**Festivals:** Botswana festivals are known to be popular attractions for tourists and locals alike who gather with family and friends to enjoy a variety of entertainment. These festivals also serve to revive the country's traditional culture and unify the various ethnic groups. Tourists generally enjoy the opportunity to observe traditional dancing and musical events which characterize indigenous customs of southern Africa. In recent years, many of Botswana's traditional village festivities have expanded into larger, more modern events. Many of the larger festivals occur in the Gaborone area.

**Feasts:** Feasts are an essential part of social events, particularly weddings and funerals. Men typically cook meat in large iron pots while women prepare side dishes such as porridge, rice, pumpkin, squash, coleslaw, or beet salad.

# 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

## Dining Customs

While dining customs vary by region, it is common throughout Botswana for families to share mealtimes. Prior to serving meals, the wife or a child traditionally brings a basin of warm water and a towel for diners to wash their hands. The wife or a child then serves plates of stew and vegetables, first to the family head and any visitors (see p.1 of *Family and Kinship*). Family members then wait for visitors to take the first bite before beginning their meals. Visitors signal their satisfaction at the end of a meal by leaving a small amount of food on the plate and using the Setswana phrase "*Ke itumetse*" ("I am pleased") to thank the host family.

**Typical Meals:** Breakfast in Botswana is usually limited to thin sorghum porridge, sometimes accompanied by milk or tea. Lunch is more substantial, generally consisting of a stew of meat, beans, cabbage, spinach, or wild greens along with thick sorghum porridge. Dinner is usually limited to buttered bread and tea. There is also a customary twice daily tea break which occurs in the morning and afternoon. This tradition is a legacy from British influence (see p.4-7 of *History and Myth*).

**Meat:** Although beef is the most preferred meat, most families can neither eat nor preserve surplus meat from a slaughtered cow before at least some of it spoils. Consequently, goat is more common for everyday meals. Batswana use every part of slaughtered animals including the head, skin, and hooves, and many prefer bone-in cuts so that they can chew on the bone.

Although domesticated livestock is the most common source of meat, wild game and birds are an important part of the diet for many rural Batswana. They generally do not eat baboons, hyenas, fish, or most snakes, and most also avoid pork, which many Batswana consider unclean.

The most popular meat dish is ***seswaa***, which is made by boiling beef with salt until it is soft and shredded. Another popular dish is ***serobe***, made by boiling the intestines and hooves of a goat, sheep, or cow, and then mincing the intestines and serving them with porridge. Batswana also make a type of jerky called ***segwapa***.

**Grains and Wild Plants:** The staple food for most Batswana is porridge, either ***bogobe***, made from sorghum or millet, or ***phaleshe***, made from corn. Batswana also eat a wide variety of wild plants, including more than 100 distinct beans, fruits, greens, nuts, and tubers. These foods are often made into popular snacks, such as ground watermelon seeds or preserved wild greens.

***Phane***

Dried caterpillars, known as ***phane*** in Setswana, are a snack and seasonal delicacy sold in the markets of Botswana. ***Phane*** are harvested by hand from the leaves of the ***mophane*** trees which grow in northern Botswana. They are then gutted, dried, salted and sold by street vendors. ***Phane*** are known to have been a favorite of former Botswana President Sir Seretse Khama (see *History and Myth*).

## Beverages

The most popular drink in Botswana is sorghum beer, both ***bojalwa*** (home-brewed) and ***chibuku*** (commercial). Although ***bojalwa*** is considered a poor man's drink, the elite do consume it on special occasions. Some Batswana also drink ***khadi***, an alcoholic drink which tastes like apple cider and is made from honey, cream of tartar, and indigenous grewia berries. ***Khadi*** is sometimes infused with toxic substances such as battery acid or pool chemicals in order to increase its potency. The most popular non-alcoholic drink in Botswana is ***mashi*** (milk), which is generally made into ***madila*** (sour milk) so that it does not spoil as quickly. At weddings and funerals, Batswana also enjoy ***gemere***, a non-alcoholic drink made from ginger, cream of tartar, and sugar.

## Health Overview

Botswana's prudent management of government revenue and natural resources (see p.1 of *Economics and Resources*) has enabled healthcare access to keep pace with a growing population. However, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has taken a heavy toll and continues to devastate the country despite massive public health campaigns.

**Traditional Practices:** Many Batswana seek medical help from traditional healers rather than Western-style doctors (see p.2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In particular, rural Batswana appreciate the cultural understanding and social influence of traditional healers and their medicines, which are made from wild herbs, roots, bark, and leaves. These home remedies are popular because they are both affordable and readily available.

**Modern Healthcare System:** Botswana spends about 5% of its GDP on the public health system, which focuses largely on primary and preventive care. Botswana currently has about 35 hospitals, 357 clinics, 346 health posts, and 1,117 mobile stops. Unlike many African countries, 90% of Batswana live within 5 miles of a healthcare facility.

### HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS was first identified in Botswana in 1985. By 2002, the infection had reached epidemic levels and was declared a national emergency. Botswana conducts numerous prevention and outreach programs (see p.4 of *Learning and Knowledge*) and was the first country in Africa to distribute lifesaving anti-retroviral treatments free of charge. Although these measures have boosted treatment levels to near 93% and slashed mother-to-child transmission to just 1%, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Botswana remains persistently high at 16% (2022 estimate), the 4th highest rate in the world.

**Causes:** HIV began to spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-1980s during a period when the region also had the world's highest urbanization rate. The trade and migration which accompanied this urbanization accelerated the spread of the virus by bringing people from diverse regions into close contact.

In addition, since HIV infection manifests itself slowly, many infected people unknowingly infected others within these increasingly dense population centers.

In Botswana, cultural and economic factors continue to amplify the effects of these broader demographic trends. Despite Botswana's impressive economic success in recent years, significant income inequality remains (see p.1 of *Economics and Resources*). Widespread poverty leads to malnourishment, which directly contributes to the spread of HIV by limiting the effectiveness of anti-retroviral medications and weakening the immune system. Poverty also leads some young women to seek relationships with wealthy older men in order to secure an income. Largely powerless, these women are often unable to insist on safe sex, monogamy, or an end to the relationship.

Furthermore, since Botswana culture ties gender identity to fertility (see p.3 of *Sex and Gender*), there is a social expectation that men will have unprotected sex with as many partners as possible. Finally, the social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS prevents many individuals from getting tested for the virus.

**Consequences:** The HIV/AIDS epidemic has had devastating economic and social consequences. First, the virus has widened the gap between rich and poor in Botswana because poor households are more vulnerable to economic losses associated with treatment, lost income, and funeral expenses. Second, HIV/AIDS has created a nation of mourners: nearly 33% Batswana have lost a friend or relative to HIV/AIDS. Third, the virus has disrupted traditional kinship systems and gender roles (see p.3 of *Family and Kinship* and p.1-2 of *Sex and Gender*), greatly weakening the social support system upon which Batswana have traditionally depended in times of hardship and tragedy.

**Life Expectancy:** Before the HIV/AIDS crisis began in the 1980s, Botswana's life expectancy hovered in the mid-60s. By 2001, HIV/AIDS had slashed this life expectancy to 49. By 2024, life expectancy had recovered to 66, largely due to free anti-retroviral medications provided by the government.

# 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

## Economic Overview

Between 1966 and 2009, Botswana had the third-highest average per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the world, trailing only China and Oman. Botswana owes this stellar growth to sound economic management and massive diamond reserves. Although diamond-fueled economic growth has transformed Botswana into a middle-income country, it has also engendered a dangerous overdependence on diamond revenues and created extreme income inequality.

## Discovery of Diamonds

Although Botswana has commercially significant deposits of copper, nickel, and soda ash, diamonds are by far the most important natural resource. The first diamonds were discovered at Orapa in 1967, just one year after independence (see p.9 of *History and Myth*). Although they were discovered by De Beers, a South African mining company, the Botswana government was able to negotiate very favorable terms which have resulted in 80% of diamond profits returning to the government. Today, the diamond industry is entirely controlled by Debswana Diamond Company, a 50-50 joint venture between the Botswana government and De Beers.

## Diversification

In recent years, diamond mining has accounted for roughly 30-40% of GDP, approximately 87-90% of export earnings, and about 1/3rd of the government's revenues. This level of dependence ties the national budget to a single commodity which fluctuates in price and will eventually be depleted: by one projection, Botswana's diamond reserves will be completely exhausted by 2030.

In addition, despite the size of the diamond industry, it employs just 4% of the labor force. Consequently, the Botswana government is currently trying to expand and diversify the economy both by controlling more of the diamond supply chain and by bolstering other industries such as manufacturing, tourism, and financial services.

**Diamond Processing:** Historically, Botswana shipped most of its raw diamonds to major cutting and polishing centers in New York, Belgium, China, and India. However, since this arrangement deprives Botswana of job growth and export earnings, the government is now trying to nurture a domestic processing industry by providing financial incentives to Botswana's cutting and polishing firms.

**Manufacturing:** Accounting for 5% of GDP, the manufacturing sector employs 9% of the workforce. Botswana primarily manufactures building materials, household products, textiles, vehicles, and beverages. The government is trying to attract new manufacturing firms by offering duty-free equipment and raw material imports, deductions of up to 200% for training costs, and a tax holiday of 5-10 years following incorporation.

**Tourism:** With exotic wildlife and safari destinations such as Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta, Botswana is a popular attraction for up-market tourism, although it only accounts for approximately 12% GDP and 8% of employment.

**Financial Services:** Enjoying free capital flows and a well-educated labor force, financial services currently account for 15% of Botswana's GDP and employ 15% of the workforce. In addition, the fast-growing Botswana Stock Exchange has averaged a 24% aggregate return over the last decade. There are 10 commercial banks in Botswana, the largest of which are Barclay's Bank, the First National Bank of Botswana, Stanbic Bank Botswana, and Standard Chartered Bank. Access to financial services is limited for many Batswana because banking service fees are prohibitively high and over half of the population lives in areas void of a bank branch.

**Currency**

The currency of Botswana is the Botswana pula (P), which is subdivided into 100 thebe (t). The pula is issued in 5 banknote denominations (P10, 20, 50, 200, 500) and 7 coin denominations (5t, 10, 25, 50, P1, 2, 5). Although the exchange rate fluctuates, recently $1 has been valued at about P13.70.

Since it replaced the South African rand in 1976, the pula has been a stable currency by African standards, with average annual inflation of less than 10% through 2021 which displayed an increase in value of 3%.

### Foreign Trade

In 2022, Botswana's exports ($8.9 billion) exceeded its imports ($8.09 billion) by $200 million, largely due to exports increasing by 13% from the previous year as global demand for diamonds bounced back to pre-pandemic levels.

Most of Botswana's exports, diamonds, copper ore, insulated wire, coal, and cattle, are sold to the UAE (27%), Belgium (18%), and India (15%). Botswana imports diamonds, refined petroleum, trucks, raw sugar, and plastic products mainly from South Africa (61%), Namibia (9%), and Belgium (5%).

### Foreign Aid

As Botswana became a middle-income country, foreign aid fell from $145 million in 1990 to $30 million in 2000. However, foreign aid has increased in recent years partly due to an influx of funds for the fight against HIV/AIDS, including $32.7 million from the US in 2022 (see p.8 of *Political and Social Relations*).

### Agriculture and Land Policy

Once the mainstay of Botswana's economy, agriculture now accounts for only 2% of GDP and about 20% of Batswana still rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Major products include livestock, sorghum, maize, millet, cowpeas, and beans. Derived from a blend of traditional and colonial customs, Botswana's land policy distinguishes three different land-use rights.

**Tribal Land:** All Batswana over 18 are entitled to a plot of tribal land, which accounts for 71% of total land area. Although tribal land can be inherited, it cannot be bought or sold, nor can it be repossessed as long as the owner uses it. Although tribal land

was once administered by tribal chiefs, a law passed shortly after independence transferred their authority to 12 autonomous "Land Boards."

**State Land:** State land, which accounts for 25% of total land area, is owned by the government but can be leased for terms of either 50 years for commercial use or 99 years for residential use. Most cities are classified as state land, with up to 95% of some cities belonging to the government.

**Freehold Land:** Freehold land, which accounts for 4% of total land area, can be bought, sold, and inherited freely, although sales to foreign nationals are subject to certain restrictions.

### Standards of Wealth

Traditionally, cattle have been the dominant standard of wealth in Botswana because they provide many traditional necessities: nutrition in the form of milk or meat, furniture or clothing in the form of leather, locomotion in pulling plows, and financial liquidity as an asset or part of a bride price (see p.2 of *Family and Kinship*). Although cash has become an acceptable substitute for cattle in most contexts due to industrialization and urbanization, cattle are still seen as the true measure of wealth.

### Economic Impact of HIV/AIDS

Although the HIV/AIDS epidemic is clearly a public health crisis (see p.3-4 of *Sustenance and Health*), it also threatens Botswana's long-term economic growth. Since HIV/AIDS is frequently fatal, Botswana's extremely high prevalence rate will inevitably reduce the supply of available labor. Similarly, because infected individuals experience long-term side effects requiring carefully controlled treatment, they generally have high work absentee rates, making them less productive on average. These labor market effects are compounded by the fact that the government must cut investment for the future in order to treat today's infected individuals – a move which significantly limits long-term growth prospects.

# 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

## Overview

While Botswana has a reliable transportation and communications infrastructure, rural areas continue to lag behind urban in technological advancement.

## Transportation

All settlements with a population over 100 are connected to the national transportation grid, which the government consistently maintains. Although migration has dispersed friends and relatives across the country (see p.1 of *Family and Kinship*), Batswana often travel long distances to visit one another via private buses and pay-per-destination hitchhiking.

**Roadways:** Botswana's large network of well-maintained roads includes 6,541 miles of paved roads and 13,693 miles of gravel roads or sandy tracks and carries 90% of freight and passenger traffic. The Trans-Kalahari Highway links Gaborone with Namibia's capital, Windhoek, and a network of roads in eastern Botswana provides access to South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

At independence, Botswana had fewer than 8 miles of roadways. In the 1970s, the Botswana government undertook an ambitious modernization project which included expanding the national road system in order to link major population centers. This new road network facilitated migration from villages to cities and allowed Batswana to establish large cattle posts in previously uninhabited areas.

**Vehicles:** Botswana ranks high among African countries for both vehicle ownership and traffic fatalities. Drunk driving is relatively common in Botswana, especially towards the end of the month when people receive their paychecks.

**Railways:** Government-owned Botswana Railways manages the country's 552-mile rail network, which includes a main line linking Botswana with South Africa and Zimbabwe and branch

lines used to export soda ash and import raw materials for the textile industry. Botswana Railways' passenger service was eliminated in 2009 due to poor management, competition from roadways, and South African control over freight traffic routes. Consequently, freight traffic has declined in recent years.

**Airways:** Botswana has 26 airports, 10 of which have paved runways. Air Botswana, the national carrier, operates a fleet of 8 airliners out of Gaborone, with domestic links to Francistown, Kasane, and Maun and regional links to Harare, Johannesburg, and Lusaka Despite its small size, Air Botswana is known for its reliability and efficiency. Botswana is also home to charter companies which use small planes to ferry tourists from the northern hubs of Maun and Kasane to the many tourist camps in the Okavango and Chobe regions.

## Energy

Botswana is a member of the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP), a common electricity market and infrastructure shared by 12 nations. Although this membership provides Botswana with one of the most reliable electricity systems in Africa, it also makes Botswana partially liable for disruptions in the power supply of South Africa, which dominates SAPP. Botswana imports roughly 52% of its power, a majority from SAPP, and domestically produces the remaining 48%.

While electricity is reliable in Botswana, high prices have prompted some businesses to relocate to other countries in southern Africa. In addition, nearly all settlements with over 1,000 people have access to electricity, although many rural Batswana cannot afford to use it for much more than lighting. Instead, many of them continue to rely upon wood fuel, a key contributor to deforestation (see *Political and Social Relations*).

## Media

Botswana's press is free but closely monitored. The government, which dominates popular broadcast media, is often accused of restricting opposition views. In addition, the National Assembly recently passed the Media Practitioners Act, which mandates the registration of all media workers.

**Radio and Television:** Botswana has 6 radio stations, 2 of which are government-owned: Radio Botswana 1 (RB1) broadcasts current affairs programs in English and Setswana, while Radio Botswana 2 (RB2) mainly broadcasts popular music. The 4 privately-owned radio stations play popular music or talk segments aimed at the youth market.

Botswana has 2 broadcast television stations: the government-owned Botswana Television (BTV), which reaches about half of Botswana, while the privately-owned Gaborone Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) only serves the area around Gaborone. In addition to these channels, many Batswana receive broadcast signals or satellite service from South Africa.

**Print Media:** Botswana's small but thriving newspaper industry is primarily based in cities and towns. Although the government distributes a free daily known as the *Daily News*, the most widely read papers are the privately-owned *Mmegi* and *Botswana Guardian*. Other newspapers include the *Monitor*, *The Botswana Gazette*, *The Midweek Sun*, the *Sunday Standard*, *The Voice*, *The Mirror*, and *Mokgosi*.

### Telecommunications

Botswana has an expanding, world-class telecommunications infrastructure supervised by an open and fair regulatory system. As part of regional development efforts, Botswana is currently expanding the fiber-optic network which links major population centers.

**Telephones:** Botswana's telephone network links all but the remotest villages, although landline use has fallen in recent years as mobile use steadily increased. There was an average of 165 mobile subscribers per 100 persons in 2022.

**Internet:** Although Botswana has one of the highest bandwidths per capita in Africa, only about 74% of Batswana use the Internet. It is primarily confined to cities, with connectivity in remote areas often limited to "bushmail," a radio-based e-mail service with extremely low bandwidth.

# AFCLC

For more information on
the Air Force Culture and Language Center visit:
airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC

For more information on
United States Air Forces Europe & Africa visit:
http://www.usafe.af.mil

## CULTURE GUIDE

Access all of the AFCLC's expeditionary culture field guides in our mobile app!

GET IT ON Google Play

Available on the iPhone App Store

DoD Enterprise Mobility
Personal Use
Mobile Apps