



Dump Scavenging in Botswana: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Botswana is usually regarded as a model for economic development in Africa. But, like other developing countries, it is faced with the challenges of elevating the wellbeing of its population and rising unemployment. Scavenging which in itself is the act of searching through and retrieving discarded items for recycling became the new means of livelihoods in tackling unemployment in the country. The significant role of women in scavenging and waste management was identified with serious challenges such as proneness to all kinds of pollutants and spreading of dangerous pathogens and lack of public-private partnerships in waste management. To overcome these; the medical health needs of the scavengers and waste managers should be considered with uttermost importance, most specifically to women. Hence, policies and incentive structures should be instituted to encourage and compensate women in waste management. Also, more advocacies to be put in place to educate the entire citizenry on positive waste management that leads to wealth creation.

Keywords: Botswana; Recycling; Scavenger; Waste Management

Introduction

Waste management in most Sub-Saharan African towns and cities remains highly challenging despite its importance in attaining healthy environment. This becomes more worrisome as the region continue to experience rapid growth or explosion in population with attendant accelerating speed of waste production (Kwetey et al., 2014; Phonchi-Tshekiso et al., 2020). The process of urbanization in the last decade has been fast-tracked mainly in cities and towns of sub-Saharan Africa coping with informal hyper-growth (Martin-Moreau and Ménascé, 2020). Most of these towns/cities are categorized by an economy that is heavily dependent on the informal sector and extreme poverty. The high/rapid concentration of people in this emerging urban cities/towns has two consequences; rise in waste generation and creation of



large pool of unemployed, leaving underemployed people with few or no alternative means of earning a living (Owusu-Sekyere, 2014). In order to earning a living and possibly clean up the environment in these emerging urban cities, people came up with the idea of “*waste to wealth*”. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the participation of women in this activity called ‘*dump scavenging*’ which translate into wealth if properly managed. It also intends to fill the gap in understanding the attributes and dynamics of dump scavenging in Botswana and then proffer way forward.

History of dump scavenging in Botswana

Botswana is usually regarded as a model for economic development in Africa (Rankokwane and Gwebu, 2006). But, like other developing countries, it is faced with the challenges of elevating the wellbeing of its population. The 2021 unemployment rate show that among the economically active population 24.7% of them are unemployed (Statista, 2022) and more than 30% of the population lives below the poverty line.

To tackle the unemployment, Botswana government put in place several programmes such as the poverty eradication programme, youth development fund, Citizen entrepreneurship development agency (CEDA), local enterprise authority, Livestock Management, and Infrastructure Developmen (LIMID) and the popular presidential small stock initiative among others to support self-employment among its citizenries. However, the inadequacy of these commendable efforts has led some people into undertaking the new means of livelihoods such as dump scavenging. Scavenging in itself is the act of searching through and retrieving discarded items that other people do not want. Waste picking is a response to wide spread of poverty, unemployment, and lack of social security services (Baud and Schenk, 1994, Huysman, 1994). The activities of this sub-sector have not been extensively documented in Botswana, apart from the sensational and random criticisms from the media.

However, the following studies speaks to the women participation in dump scavenging in Botswana:

1. A survey of scavengers at the Gaborone dump site in 2003 showed that most (64%) of them are between age 15-24 years. 80% of the scavengers were males while one in every five (20%) of the scavengers were females. The gender disparity between males and females is said to be attributed to the Tswana traditional roles that categorize males to be breadwinners. However, with the gradual loss of the traditionally recognized roles of males, more women have now come to shoulder the responsibility of being breadwinners, hence, their participation in scavenging activities at the dump sites. The gender disparity can also be attributed to the fact that scavenging is gender biased and a risky career into which males mainly may venture (Rankokwane and Gwebu, 2006).
2. Another survey on scavengers at Lobatse dump site between 2011 and 2013 showed increased participation by female to the tune of 46.9% (Gwisai et al., 2014) as against 20% female participation recorded in earlier study at Gaborone dump site. This agrees with earlier point raised on the fact that women are now taking full responsibility of being their household breadwinners.



Also, the activities of women as scavengers are seen in public places like; malls, offices, parties, as so on where they are seen picking cans, bottles, plastics, etc. These items are then taking to recycling collection points where they are exchanged for money. Thus these scavengers actually play a huge role in attaining waste management strategy goal of waste reduction through recycling. Also, at the end of fourth quarter of 2021, women employed in the water supply and waste management sector of Botswana was 48.3% (Statistics Botswana, 2022) which show good representation of women in this sector of the economy.

Challenges Associated with Dump Scavenging

The numerous challenges at the dump site include the incinerator which produces smoke that affects people working in the dump site; the emission from the incinerator also produces a strong foul smell, while the dust output leads to health disorders such as coughing, eye and nose irritation. This also results into headache, general body weakness, common cold, coughing, spitting, chest pain and shortness of breath. The major effects of disease symptoms appear to be experienced through the respiratory system and this could be due to the way scavengers work through the waste without mouth and nose coverings.

Scavengers are also prone to all kinds of pollutants and spreading of dangerous pathogens from the dump sites that may spread diseases, through contact with salvaged materials. This means that the quality of health among the town dwellers will decline over time as they are impacted by dump site related ailments. Thus, the town is progressively less healthy and less liveable to the residents.

Protections against disease infection and physical injury are totally lacking for scavengers as scavenging is an informal sector activity and has not attracted much official attention. This negligence by government is risky because the scavengers have the potential to cause epidemic ailments in cities or towns where they are found.

So far in Botswana, public-private partnerships are not entrenched in waste management operations. In particular, public-private partnerships in the design of dump siting towards engineered and sanitary operations, incineration of municipal solid waste and national waste management plans are almost absent. The only cooperation and/or partnerships between the public sector and private sector companies are mostly through contracts for the provision of waste collection and disposal services. In most cases, the provision of waste recovery is made through the help of the informal sector, often ignoring environmental protection (Taye and Kanda, 2011).

Botswana Government Position on Waste to Wealth

Eco-friendly care has become typical discussion among those with growth-oriented minds in climate justice activity. It is evident that the abuse of our environments leads to traumatic consequences for everyone here on earth. However, there is an ethos of recycling that is taking on a different way of advocating.

Previously, recycling was perceived as for individuals without the means to continually spend. But, with the move of attaching monetary value to recycling activities, the public are being



stirred up on ways of directly benefiting from proper waste management while making it a lifestyle choice.

The Botswana's Ministry of the Environment, Natural Resource Conservation and Tourism has stepped into the field of recycling in order to raise awareness about having healthy environments and ecological care, and also to advance Botswana yearning for means of alleviating poverty. The ministry carried out a waste management project piloted in June 2021 in partnership with UNDP, to demonstrate how recycling can be shaped into various spheres of the citizenry lives – from malls and workplaces to the homes (UNDP, 2021). The pilot project was run as an initial means of extending the applications of the Integrated Waste Management Policy earlier approved by the Parliament in April 2021.

Also, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) listed waste management alongside pollution, poor urban conditions, and inadequate access to sanitation services as some of the key challenges to development in the region and is committed to promoting control and sound education in these areas (SADC, 2022).

Way forward on Dump Scavenging in Botswana

In Botswana, almost all generated waste ends up in the dump site unlike the developed countries where only a very small fraction wind up in the dump site. The following steps should be taken in order to cut down on the flow of waste that ends up in the dump site and improve the activities and lives of dump scavengers:

1. Waste sorting should be encouraged at all levels; malls, workplaces and homes with proper collection by government, private companies and individual citizens for proper transfer to recycling centres instead of sending them to dump site.
2. The medical health needs of the scavengers and waste managers should be considered with uttermost importance, most specifically women. The ideals of personal hygiene and environmental sanitation to be inculcated in the scavengers and dump site workers.
3. There should be properly constituted or organized public-private partnerships that will oversee the management of waste recovery in Botswana and transform same into wealth with women being key drivers to underscore their importance in this sector.
4. More advocacies to be put in place to educate the entire citizenry on positive waste management that leads to wealth creation.
5. Policies and incentive structures to be instituted to encourage and compensate women in waste management.

Conclusion

There is so much yet to be done in Botswana to catch up with economic deficits which makes waste management an important alternative for public well-being. It is also a serious economic relief avenue that cannot be ignored, hence, the journey to financial liberty has begun. The ideal is to take the waste and turn them into something better which translate into wealth.



Nevertheless, the future seems promising for the waste management sector in Botswana. It is now upon every resident to play our parts and most especially women.

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