

Botswana graduates: Unemployed or unemployable?

There is no doubt that Botswana is at pole position to reap the benefits of the relocation of the Diamond Trading Company (DTC) from London to Gaborone, the intended Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional integration as well as an industrialised economy, to name a few recent economic developments. What is in doubt however is whether the country's human resource supply is adequate for the projects and industries that will come up as a result of these economic developments, writes **VICTOR BAATWENG**.

However, the trend is not unique to Botswana as businesses around the world are also reporting a skills shortage epidemic that is weighing down on growth prospects. South Africa faces the same challenges to a large extent: when it comes to shortage of specific or technical skills, South Africa stands at 83 percent, lack of appropriate work experience at 66 percent and lack of required qualifications at 63 percent.

Both South Africa and Botswana's percentage in terms of the mentioned challenges are higher than the recorded global average. Other significant factors that are worth noting are shortage of employability skills, poor motivation or attitude among applicants as well as lack of recruitment expertise. The IBR shows that almost four in ten (39 percent) businesses around the world are struggling to recruit the right people, with a lack of technical skills cited as the primary problem (64 percent). The concern is that a lack of talent will dampen business productivity, ultimately threatening future growth and profitability.

Dinesh Mallan, a senior partner at Grant Thornton Botswana says, "In the current competitive world, business leaders require a highly skilled and talented workforce to achieve their objectives. The best people increase productivity, save time and money for the organisation and ultimately grow the business. To increase stakeholder's interest, businesses focus on upgrading their own internal training programmes to suit challenging requirements. Employees need to show the appetite to learn to be better skilled for their own growth and for the organisation's growth and adoption. Are these graduates unemployed because there is shortage of jobs or because they are unemployable? A recent research from the Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) indicates that the greatest challenges that Botswana faces in recruiting skilled workers are shortage of specific or technical skills (79 percent), lack of appropriate work experience which stands at 77 percent and a lack of required qualifications which stands at 71 percent.

Currently latest figures from the statistics agency show that Botswana's unemployment rate is at 17.6 percent, poverty level of 20.7 percent and high income inequality. Although the major problem over the years has been this high rate of unemployment, it has since emerged that Botswana is at the same time facing challenges to recruit skilled workers.

With over 10,000 students graduating from the University of Botswana (UB) every academic year, it therefore brings the question, 'Are these graduates unemployed because there is shortage of jobs or because they are unemployable? A recent research from the Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) indicates that the greatest challenges that Botswana faces in recruiting skilled workers are shortage of specific or technical skills (79 percent), lack of appropriate work experience which stands at 77 percent and a lack of required qualifications which stands at 71 percent.



LACKING REQUIRED SKILLS: Graduates

Poor motivation or attitude amongst applicants		Shortage of specific or technical skills	
Botswana	62%	Botswana	79%
South Africa	42%	South Africa	83%
Global	39%	Global	64%

for the betterment of themselves and of the organisation." Dinesh added, "We in Botswana have a forward looking Government that comes out with various initiatives to address the skills and talent shortage. These initiatives include the establishment of Education Hub, National Internship Programme, Internship in partnership with Private enterprise, setting up of Botswana's own accounting qualification BICA (Botswana Institute of Chartered Accountants) to empower our younger generation to transform Botswana into a knowledge based economy. These initiatives are intended to make Botswana sharpen their skills, make them employable and marketable globally, thus creating a positive impact on the economy as a whole."

Paul Raleigh, Global leader of growth at Grant Thornton International, said: "With unemployment running so high in many mature economies, it is somewhat ironic that business leaders are concerned by a lack of skills. In the short-term they will need to plug these skills gaps with people from outside the organisation as best they can. But in the longer-term they need to invest in their internal training programmes to mould the people that will help them deliver on strategy, innovate and ultimately grow."

The impact of these workforce issues on business growth prospects is evident. The IBR reveals that more than one in four businesses (28 percent) expects their 2013 expansion plans to suffer as

a result of skills shortages, rising to more than one in three in the BRIC economies (36 percent). This has dropped from 35 percent globally pre-financial crisis when employment levels were much higher - particularly in mature economies.

Ronald Badubi, a political science graduate from the University of Botswana says that although the advent of government's internship programme brought hope among these unemployed multitudes in 2008, "fast forward to 2011, this initiative has proved not to be of much help. It is slowly reaching a *cu de sac*."

Badubi expresses disappointment towards institutions such as University of Botswana, "Which are hell-bent on pursuing the profit motive without taking the prevailing job market into consideration. The rate at which UB enrolls students for liberal arts programmes is saddening given that most graduates of these humanistic disciplines are in the unemployed ranks."

Finance and Development Minister, Kenneth Matambo says the Government would in the second half of the National Development Plan 10 (NDP10) address the rising unemployment statistics. Matambo says that the second half of NDP 10 will seek to address unemployment, particularly among the youth.

"Resources should be committed to fighting abject poverty through employment creation initiatives and programmes. NDP 10 aims at ensuring that those that are assisted through abject poverty eradication programmes graduate from such programmes."

Currently, the government's programmes are underway to address these challenges which include among others, labour intensive public works programme (Ipelegeng), youth employment and development funds and provision of social safety nets. The National Economic Diversification Drive Strategy (NEDDS) which is intended to enhance productive capacity of domestic firms is expected to have significant contribution in employment creation and broad-based economic growth.

With all put on spotlight, the Human Resource Development Advisory Council (HRDAC) acting Chief Executive of HRDAC, Abel Modungwa says that the key feature of his organisation's plan will be the central role of using employment demand and labour market forecasts to determine the shape and size of the education and skills training system.