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A Comparative Paper on Social Protection Between Botswana and South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This comparative study shows the various social protection systems in Botswana and South Africa, showing how each country's history, politics, and economic conditions have shaped the systems in place today. Although both countries share the same regional challenges such as poverty, inequality, and social vulnerability, they have taken very different paths in building support structures. South Africa has created a large rights based system which provides citizens with a clear guarantee of support and has enabled the country to reach millions through grants such as the Child Support Grant, the Older Persons Grant, and the Disability Grant. These transfers play a major role in reducing poverty, stabilizing household income, and helping families who face unemployment and economic stress. However, the system is costly to maintain and cannot fully solve the deeper structural causes of inequality.

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Whilst Botswana has evolved gradually from traditional practices of community support into a modern state led framework. After Botswana gained independence in 1966, resources from the diamond industry allowed the government to expand welfare programmes, which include Old Age Pension, Orphan Care, food support schemes, and school feeding. These programmes have made a real difference, especially in rural communities and in households affected by HIV and AIDS. Even so, the system remains more targeted and less comprehensive than South Africa's and faces pressure from fiscal constraints and limited economic diversification.

South Africa highlights the advantages of a robust legal framework that enforces rights and holds the state accountable. Botswana demonstrates how community solidarity and gradual investment can achieve an adaptable system that delivers to local needs. Equally, both countries are heavily reliant on social protection for vulnerable populations and at the same time both need to address certain challenges regarding the sustainability of such measures and coverage gaps. Better governance, coordination enhancement and the linking of social protection with employment and livelihood opportunities are set to form key elements of developing more resilient and inclusive systems for the future.

Keywords: *Botswana, Compartaive, Social Protection, South Africa*

1.INTRODUCTION

The origins of social protection lie in the first World Development Report of 1990, which emphasized the need for governments to put in place mechanisms to help people in short-term stresses and disasters (Mashanova *et al.,* 2025). Social protection refers to all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption support to the poor, protect vulnerable groups against livelihood risks, and promote the social status and rights of marginalised populations (Devereux & Sabates, 2004). Its overall aim is to reduce the economic and social vulnerability experienced by poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups (Devereux and Sabates, 2004). Access to social protection and labour programmes is essential, offering vital support to millions of people who face poverty, crises and the uncertainties of daily life. As noted by the World Bank Group

(2025), social protection extends far beyond direct cash or in kind assistance. It includes policies and systems that equip individuals and households with the financial, informational and skill based tools they need to manage shocks, overcome poverty and pursue employment opportunities (World Bank Group, 2025).

The notion that social protection should be a core strategy for reducing poverty in developing countries has now become widely accepted within international development practice (Hickey *et al.,* 2020). While celebrated for their impact, especially when delivered as cash transfers, social protection initiatives are sometimes presented as an all encompassing solution to multidimensional poverty and inequality (Hickey *et al.,* 2020). This growing emphasis highlights the need to understand how different countries design, implement and sustain their social protection systems. This paper contributes to this understanding by providing a comparative analysis of social protection in Botswana and South Africa.

2. BACKGROUND

South Africa is widely regarded as having one of the most comprehensive social protection systems in Africa (Ndzabamwita and Dinbabo, 2022). Its extensive coverage, relative generosity and efficient delivery of social grants are supported by strong political commitment and rights guaranteed in law (Devereux and Sabates, 2004). What distinguishes South Africa further is that its social protection agenda has been government led and supported by active domestic civil society engagement rather than external donor influence. This system is enforced through a justiciable social contract embedded in the national constitution (Devereux and Sabates, 2004). The significant reduction in poverty following the end of apartheid is attributed in large part to these expansive social protection programmes (Hoefer and Midgley, 2013). Social grants, including pensions, disability payments and child support grants, have become the primary source of income for many households. They play a crucial role in improving living standards, promoting financial stability and reducing poverty (Nala, 2023).

In contrast, social protection in Botswana has evolved through both traditional and formal structures. Prior to independence, various informal systems such as mafisa (the

rich loaned cattle to the poor), go tshwara teu (the rich gave cattle to the poor as a token of appreciation for looking after their herds) and majako (the poor worked in the fields of the rich in exchange for part of the harvest) served as community based mechanisms through which wealthier households supported poorer families (Botlhale *et al.,* 2015). After independence in 1966, the Government of Botswana formalised a state funded social protection regime as a key component of public policy (Botlhale *et al.,* 2015). Policy making for social protection in Botswana occurs at both community and national levels and involves a diverse set of actors including government ministries, political parties and civil society organisations (Botlhale *et al.,* 2015). Despite the existence of numerous programmes, achieving comprehensive and transformative social protection in many African countries, including Botswana, requires addressing fiscal constraints as well as strengthening political commitment and civil society mobilisation (Devereux, 2011).

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Botswana and South Africa have developed different approaches to social protection, yet both continue to face persistent poverty and inequality. While literature exists on each country separately, there is limited comparative analysis that directly evaluates how their systems differ in design, coverage, and effectiveness. This gap makes it difficult to understand what each country can learn from the other to strengthen its social protection framework.

4. AIM OF STUDY

The aim of this study is to compare the social protection systems of Botswana and South Africa, examining their design, implementation, and outcomes in order to understand their effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To describe the main social protection programs in Botswana and South Africa.
- To compare the coverage, effectiveness, and challenges of the two systems.

- To assess the impact of their social protection measures on poverty and vulnerability.
- To identify lessons each country can learn from the other to improve social protection outcomes.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the key social protection programs in Botswana and South Africa?
- How do the two countries differ in program coverage, effectiveness, and implementation?
- What impact do these systems have on reducing poverty and vulnerability?
- What lessons can Botswana and South Africa draw from each other to strengthen their social protection systems?

7. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study is important because social protection plays a major role in reducing poverty and improving the quality of life, especially for vulnerable groups. By comparing Botswana and South Africa, countries with different historical, economic, and policy contexts, the study offers valuable insights into what types of social protection approaches work best and why.

8. RESEARCH GAP

Although studies have explored social protection in Botswana and South Africa separately, there is limited comprehensive comparative research that looks at the systems side by side. Existing literature often focuses on specific programs or individual indicators, but few studies examine the broader structural differences, the political and economic drivers behind these systems, or their long-term sustainability. This gap makes it difficult to draw lessons on what each country might adopt or adapt from the other. Therefore, this study attempts to fill an important gap by providing an integrated comparative analysis that highlights similarities, contrasts, and policy implications.

9. LITERATURE REVIEW

9.1 Understanding Social Protection

Social protection has been extended across many low and middle income countries, and programmes are increasingly designed to suit the particular social and economic environments in which they operate (Banerjee *et al.,* 2024). The concept is now widely agreed to be central to any approach to tackling poverty and marginalisation, crucially through interventions which advance and uphold human rights (Gunhidzirai and Rankopo, 2025). In Botswana, government efforts to use different forms of social support to reduce poverty can be traced over a long period, although these initiatives were severely tested during the COVID - 19 pandemic (Gunhidzirai and Rankopo, 2025). However, it has consistently expressed its commitment to reducing poverty in policy documents of key significance such as the National Development Plans, Vision 2036 and the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction (Ntseane and Solo, 2023).

Botswana has pursued a mix of strategies aimed at broad based economic growth, including financial incentives to stimulate revenue, community empowerment projects, investment in public infrastructure to improve human development and an assortment of social protection programmes to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods (Seleka *et al.,* 2007). Globally, social protection is now widely acknowledged as a vital mechanism for addressing the complex causes of poverty and malnutrition, as well as for promoting food security (Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, 2024). Evidence from several African countries, including Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, shows that cash transfer programmes reduce poverty rates, with reductions ranging from just over two percentage points in Ghana to almost fifteen percentage points in Malawi (Tirivayi *et al.,* 2021).

9.2 Social Protection in the South African Context

South Africa is often highlighted for having one of the most extensive and well institutionalised social protection systems in the developing world, supported by strong political commitment and legislative guarantees (Devereux, 2011). The system is founded on the recognition that social protection is central to promoting inclusive, fair

and sustainable development, particularly in response to poverty, inequality and economic instability (Schildberg-Hörisch, 2017). As a result, social protection frameworks in the region emphasise understanding the drivers of vulnerability, the different forms of risk faced by populations and how these risks can be mitigated (UNICEF, 2024).

Despite progress in expanding child support and providing reasonable income protection for older persons and people living with disabilities, South Africa's current social transfers are not yet capable of resolving the deeper structural roots of inequality (Department of Social Development, 2017). Even so, the country operates one of the most comprehensive systems in Africa, structured around two main pillars: social insurance and social assistance (Devereux, 2010; Nzabamwita, 2021). The social insurance pillar consists of contributory schemes administered by the state, such as the Unemployment Insurance Fund for those who lose income, the Compensation Fund for injured or ill workers and the Road Accident Fund for individuals harmed in road accidents (Fall and Steenkamp, 2020; World Bank, 2021).

The social assistance pillar is funded through taxation and provides regular cash and food transfers to the most vulnerable who are outside formal employment and unable to access private insurance (Ndzabamwita and Dinbabo, 2022). These grants are further supplemented by the Expanded Public Works Programme, which offers basic income security through public employment for working age individuals (Ndzabamwita and Dinbabo, 2022).

Figure 1: Number of social grant recipients

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Old age beneficiaries	3 400 000	3 600 000	3 700 000	3 800 000	3 900 000
Disability beneficiaries	1 100 000	1 000 000	1 000 000	1 000 000	998 516
Child support beneficiaries	12 300 000	12 500 000	12 800 000	13 000 000	13 300 000
Foster care beneficiaries	416 016	386 019	355 609	326 380	283 718
Care dependency beneficiaries	147 467	150 001	154 735	157 871	156 417
Grant-in-aid beneficiaries	192 091	221 989	273 922	311 056	279 173
Other beneficiaries	134	92	62	47	25
Total	17 555 708	17 858 101 (1.7%)	18 284 328 (2.3%)	18 595 354 (1.7%)	18 917 849 (1.7%)

Source - (Meyer, 2021)

9.3 Governance and Administration of Social Protection

Good governance plays a central role in the successful delivery of social protection programmes, especially in middle income countries where the needs of vulnerable groups vary widely (Gunhidzirai and Rankopo, 2025). In Botswana, the Department of Social Protection under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is responsible for coordinating, monitoring and implementing various social protection programmes that aim to reduce vulnerability among disadvantaged groups (UNICEF, 2019). These programmes include the World War Two Veterans Allowance, the Remote Area Development Programme, Orphan Care, Community Home Based Care, Disability Grants, assistance for needy students, support for refugees and unaccompanied children, the school feeding programme, the Destitute Persons Programme, food support for vulnerable groups, the Old Age Pension and Ipelegeng, among others (Maundeni and Mupedziswa, 2017).

Figure 2: Overview of Botswana Social Assistance Programs

Program	Implementing Agency	Benefit Provided	No. of Beneficiaries	BWP millions	USD millions	Percent of GDP
Destitute Persons (Food Basket)	MLGRD	Food, Electronic food card, in-kind	38,973	351.9	32.7	0.18
Destitute Cash Allowance	MLGRD	Cash	37,556	90.1	8.4	0.05
Old-Age Pension	MLGRD	Cash	126,424	590	55	0.30
World War II Veterans	MLGRD	Cash	1,270	9.7	0.1	0.005
Orphans Care	MLGRD	Electronic food card, social care	24,351	222.1	20.6	0.11
Community Home Based Care	MLGRD	Electronic food card, social care	1,252	15.0	1.4	0.01
Disability Allowance	MLGRD	Cash	7,805	29.9	2.8	0.02
Ipelegeng	MLGRD	Cash	73,0454	646.7	60.1	0.33
Vulnerable Group Feeding Program	MLGRD	Food	NA	714.0	70.0	0.38
Primary School Feeding Program	MLGRD	Food	268,761			
Secondary School Feeding Program	MOBE	Food	NA	308.5	30.2	0.16
Tertiary Sponsorships	MOTEST	Sponsorships & Scholarships	NA	2,151.0	210.9	1.13
Early Childhood Development	MLGRD	Day care/nursery	NA	0.4	0.039	0.0002

Source - (World Bank Group, 2022)

Similar initiatives in South Africa are facilitated through the Department of Social Development, which provides social insurance, social assistance and cash transfer programmes to support vulnerable populations (Plagerson *et al.,* 2019). Research on social protection in Botswana remains limited, highlighting the need for more scholarly attention (Gunhidzirai and Rankopo, 2025).

9.4 Poverty and Vulnerability Trends in Botswana and South Africa

According to Statistics Botswana (2021), just over twenty percent of the population experiences some form of poverty, leaving many unable to access essential resources required for total well being. Likewise, Statistics South Africa (2022) reports that more than eighteen million people live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than one dollar

ninety per day. Scholars note that although African countries possess significant natural resources, challenges such as corruption and weak management have seriously undermined economic development across the continent (Hickey *et al.,* 2020). This demonstrates that economic growth does not automatically translate into broader development outcomes. In Botswana, poverty has been linked to the lasting social and economic effects of HIV and AIDS, along with limited economic diversification, given the country's dependence on diamonds, tourism and animal husbandry (Magombeyi *et al.,* 2017).

Botswana introduced the principle of social justice and equal opportunity in the 1970s, marking its first formal move towards a deliberate commitment to social protection (Republic of Botswana, 1970). The country became the first in Africa to offer universal antiretroviral therapy in 2002, later eliminating mother to child HIV transmission in 2021 and approving pre exposure prophylaxis for high risk groups, including young women, in 2018 (Gaolathe *et al.,* 2016; Bagcchi, 2022; AVERT, 2020). Botswana is also among a small group of countries that achieved the ninety five ninety five ninety five HIV treatment targets, with more than ninety five percent of people living with HIV knowing their status, nearly all receiving treatment and almost all achieving viral suppression (Statistics Botswana, 2022). At the same time, the South African social protection system performs similarly to global developing world standards in terms of expenditure and coverage (Ndzabamwita and Dinbabo, 2022).

9.5 Historical and Political Context of Social Protection

At independence in 1966, Botswana was considered one of the poorest countries in the world (Ntseane and Solo, 2022). The situation changed rapidly after the discovery of diamonds in the early nineteen seventies that stimulated strong economic growth, increased national income and enabled the government to expand investment in social welfare.

According to Hickey (2007), social protection systems are both a product of political forces and a site of evolving relations between the state and its citizens. For instance, social pension programmes in South Africa and Namibia were initially set up to counter racial exclusion under previous political regimes. Their development later became part

of wider shifts in the social contract as both countries moved towards democratic governance (Hickey, 2007).

Social assistance in South Africa has its roots in a time when the system was primarily designed to protect the white population from poverty and hardship. Before the end of apartheid, the system was fragmented and ineffective because services were duplicated, hence not meeting the needs of the larger poor and vulnerable populations, especially black people. Following the democratic transition in 1994, South Africa began to tackle deep inequality and poverty through the establishment of a comprehensive social security framework based on social grants, which include old age pensions, disability grants, child support, and foster care grants, providing essential assistance today.

The Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004 established the system that provided the statutory basis for providing social assistance to needy households and people, and has thus been an important component of how South Africa has sought to create a more equitable society since 2004. It is legislation created in response to widespread poverty and inequality and shows the determination of this government to ensure that all its citizens are accorded the minimum required to maintain a decent level of human dignity.

10. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design. It was an approach that relied on the careful review and combination of existing published literature, government reports, policy documents, and statistical datasets related to social protection in Botswana and South Africa. The analysis was based on secondary sources, including academic journal articles, national development plans, ministerial publications, international development reports, and statistical releases. A comparative analysis method was used to investigate the two countries side by side. This approach allowed a structured comparison, which considered both the similarities and the differences between the systems. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis, where information from various documents was grouped in emerging themes like programme types, social insurance structures, social assistance mechanisms, governance arrangements, and

poverty outcomes. In so doing, the study was able to interpret patterns, draw meaningful comparisons, and identify gaps or strengths in each country's system.

11. FINDINGS

11.1 Differences in System Structure

A number of Southern African countries, such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and more recently Zimbabwe, have established relatively sophisticated social protection schemes similar in design to European models. These schemes typically couple social security for formally employed workers with means-tested social grants for vulnerable groups, including older persons and persons living with disabilities (Devereux, 2010). They are mainly financed through domestic sources and administrated by national governments with very limited donor support.

In Botswana, the state administers a broad range of social assistance programmes. These include school feeding schemes for primary and secondary learners, food support for vulnerable groups, non contributory pensions for older persons and war veterans, assistance for remote area communities, support for orphans and vulnerable children, destitute allowances, home based care for chronically ill individuals and public works programmes (Republic of Botswana and UNICEF, 2010).

South Africa, for its part, has established one of the more extensive social protection systems on the continent, informed by a sound rights-based framework and underpinned by sustained political will. The system functions through two clearly defined pillars: social insurance and social assistance. Botswana's strategy integrates long-established traditional forms of support with modern state-funded programs; however, unlike South Africa, it does not have the same level of legislative protection formalized for beneficiaries.

11.2 Coverage and Accessibility

South Africa offers a wide portfolio of social grants that reach millions of people each month, including the older persons grant, disability grant and the Child Support Grant.

These programmes form the backbone of the country's poverty alleviation efforts. In contrast, Botswana provides important but more narrowly targeted programmes such as the Old Age Pension, Orphan Care and school feeding schemes.

South Africa's coverage expanded significantly after the 2012 amendment to Section five two of the Social Assistance Act, which extended eligibility to recognised refugees, excluding only the War Veterans Grant (Brockerhoff, 2013, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2012). This was a major development in a context characterised by persistent inequality, high unemployment and labour markets that struggle to provide stable and well paying jobs (Heever, 2021).

Social security is guaranteed by the Constitution of South Africa, giving citizens a legal basis to claim support from the state (Mati, 2025). As a result, the country now operates the most extensive social assistance system in Sub Saharan Africa. This includes long standing programmes such as social pensions and the Child Support Grant, which was introduced in 1998, along with several complementary schemes. Together, these grants provide unconditional cash transfers to an estimated seventeen million beneficiaries each month (Devereux, 2021; Moses and Woolard, 2023).

11.3 Governance and Administration

Effective governance is central to the success of social protection programs, and this is particularly so in middle-income countries where the nature of poverty and vulnerability is shaped by complex social and economic dynamics. Gunhidzirai and Rankopo (2025) discuss that Botswana and South Africa have both adopted a centralized coordination structure for social protection.

In Botswana, programmes fall under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, which bears responsibility for planning, implementation, and monitoring social assistance measures. In South Africa, grants are administered through the Department of Social Development in conjunction with the South African Social Security Agency. Yet whereas the South African governance model is strongly directed by constitutional rights and formal administrative regulations, Botswana's

system reflects a combination of state policy and long-established community support traditions.

11.4 Poverty Reduction Impact

Botswana invests heavily in social protection through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. In the 2019 to 2020 financial year, social protection expenditure was distributed across several areas, with 53 percent allocated to social assistance programmes, 18 percent to scholarships and sponsorships, 26 percent to social insurance and 3 percent to other forms of support (Government of Botswana, 2019). These allocations align with the Vision 2016 pillar of a compassionate and just nation, which emphasises poverty eradication and the provision of safety nets for vulnerable groups (Molokwane and Lukamba, 2018). This commitment reflects the government's broader aim to enhance citizen well being and uphold social rights (Gunhidzirai and Rankopo, 2025).

In South Africa, social grants are considered one of the main mechanisms to reduce poverty and inequality (Fofana *et al.,* 2024). According to the most recent data, between 2015 and 2020, 17.81 million grants totaling R162.7 billion were distributed by the government, estimated at about 16 percent of all government expenditure (World Bank, 2021). The three grants-the Child Support Grant, the Older Persons Grant, and the Disability Grant-accounted for 96 percent of all grants issued and 94 percent of the total spending (World Bank, 2021).

Despite differences in scale and design, both countries rely on social protection as a vital strategy for reducing poverty and supporting vulnerable populations. South Africa's grant system has significantly helped to stabilise incomes and reduce economic exclusion. Botswana's programmes also make a meaningful contribution, particularly in communities affected by HIV and AIDS and in a context of limited economic diversification. However, both countries face constraints such as budget limitations, evolving demographic pressures and the need to harmonise fragmented programmes in order to maximise long term impact.

12. DISCUSSION

The comparison of experiences between Botswana and South Africa demonstrates clearly that social protection does not develop in isolation but is shaped by each country's political history, economic structure, and the social pressures that have emerged over time. While regional challenges facing both countries include widespread poverty, inequality, and vulnerability, the paths they have followed in trying to address these issues are very different, and these differences strongly influence the strengths and weaknesses of their current systems.

In South Africa, the bases of the current social protection system are set within a tough past characterized by racial exclusion and inequitable distribution of resources. During apartheid, welfare provisions protected the white population at large, while black communities received limited and poorly coordinated support. The political transition in 1994 beheld a new political and moral imperative to redress deep structural injustices. It is for this reason that South Africa has designed a rights-based system that treats social assistance not as a form of charity, but as a constitutional entitlement. A legal framework ensures that no citizen need fear discrimination or favouritism when claiming benefits such as the Child Support Grant, the Older Persons Grant and disability support. It also places an obligation on the state to maintain and extend such programmes. This forms the strong legal foundation that explains why South Africa has built one of the largest and most effective social protection systems in the developing world, with millions of people reached every month and contributing significantly to the reduction of poverty.

Botswana's experience followed a different trajectory. This country, prior to independence, relied on community-based support systems whereby households assisted one another through informal arrangements grounded in solidarity and shared responsibility. Following independence in 1966, Botswana was among the poorest countries globally. The discovery of diamonds in the early nineteen-seventies transformed the economy and gave the government the resources to set up formal welfare programmes. These programmes gradually supplemented, and in some respects replaced, these traditional safety nets. Unlike South Africa, however, Botswana did not anchor social protection in a robust rights-based legal framework. Botswana's system instead evolved as a set of policy-driven interventions aimed at

supporting vulnerable groups as needed. This gives the government flexibility but also creates limitations since access to support is more discretionary and less guaranteed.

The findings of the study show that these different foundations have practical implications today. South Africa's system is extensive, highly formalised and supported by significant fiscal investment. It provides unconditional and regular assistance to a wide proportion of the population, including older persons, children, people with disabilities and, more recently, recognised refugees. The size and consistency of these transfers have been shown to reduce poverty, stabilise household incomes and mitigate the effects of unemployment and inequality. However, the system also faces challenges. It is expensive to maintain, relies heavily on a narrow tax base and cannot, on its own, solve the structural issues that maintain inequality, such as limited job creation and persistent labour market barriers.

The social protection landscape in Botswana is more targeted and selective, with the government providing a set of core programmes covering Old Age Pension, Orphan Care, school feeding and food support for vulnerable groups. These have been valued and have had a positive impact-particularly in communities affected by HIV and AIDS, and in rural areas where poverty remains concentrated. Botswana also leads in the region due to its early commitment to universal HIV treatment, which has significantly improved public health outcomes and reduced vulnerability. Nevertheless, the system is less comprehensive than that of South Africa, and despite significant financial investment, challenges remain, including fiscal constraints, limited economic diversification and fragmentation across different programmes. These make it difficult to expand coverage and adequately address the needs of all vulnerable groups, especially as the cost of social protection rises.

In broad terms, the contrasts between the two systems suggest that neither country holds a perfect model, but each offers important lessons. South Africa demonstrates the value of a rights-based approach, which creates accountability, ensures predictable access to assistance, and strengthens the relationship between the state and its citizens. Botswana, on the other hand, provides an example of how traditional community structures can be supplemented effectively by modern welfare systems to

foster resilience, and how social protection can be scaled up gradually as national resources increase.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Expand and integrate coverage:** Both countries should widen access to social protection and ensure programmes are better coordinated so that no vulnerable groups are left out.
- **Strengthen fiscal sustainability:** Botswana should diversify its economy, while South Africa should broaden its revenue base to secure long term funding for social protection.
- **Improve governance and accountability:** Botswana can benefit from adopting more formal rights based structures, while South Africa should enhance efficiency and reduce administrative delays.
- **Link social protection to livelihood opportunities:** Both countries should connect social protection with skills development, employment programmes and community based livelihood support.

14. CONCLUSION

This comparative study shows how Botswana and South Africa have developed social protection systems informed by their unique histories, economic realities, and political commitments. South Africa implements a broad, rights-based system with extensive coverage that has contributed significantly to the reduction of poverty, while Botswana provides a mix of traditional support values and modern welfare interventions that continue to evolve with national development priorities. Both systems remain central to improving wellbeing and protecting the most vulnerable. Yet both systems are under pressure for fiscal sustainability, which together with increasing inequality and changing social conditions, is testing the ability of both systems to meet contemporary and future needs. Strengthening governance, expanding coverage, improving sustainability, and linking social protection to economic opportunities will be crucial for both countries to build resilient and inclusive systems.

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