



Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 145

Botswana's Economic Performance Rating Slips: Working-Aged People Express Dissatisfaction with Living Conditions

By Gladys Mokhawa

March 2014

1. Introduction

Academic and policy researchers in Botswana have been unanimous in their analysis of Botswana's economic shape. Dubbed an "economic miracle" by some (Samatar, 1999) and a "shining example" by others, Botswana continues to enjoy praise for its economic performance. Even against the projected economic slowdown due to the on-going global economic crisis, Botswana's economy is said to be doing well as witnessed by its 8.0 percent GDP growth in 2011. Positive economic prospects have not been translated into the provision of social services, which has led to the perception of Botswana being a country with "poverty amid plenty." For instance, the government may only be creating an illusion of improving living conditions of the rural poor. The debate over whether the success of the economy relates to the provision of social programmes remains prominent within development literature. Central to the debate is the cautionary note that equating economic development with social development can be misleading unless one understands how the benefits of growth are distributed.

In Botswana, people give the government high performance ratings for economic management, but they say their own living conditions are bad. This bulletin will examine the contrast between people's perception of effective economic management and their stated living conditions.

2. Afrobarometer Survey

Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). The survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical economic and political issues. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and sharing research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as four rounds of surveys have been held from 1999 to 2008 and Round 5 is presently complete.

Afrobarometer surveys are conducted using a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries and over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 1200 adults Botswana selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age. A sample of this size

allows for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Botswana citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Botswana was conducted by the Southern African Barometer, between June 30 and July 11 2012.

3. Background

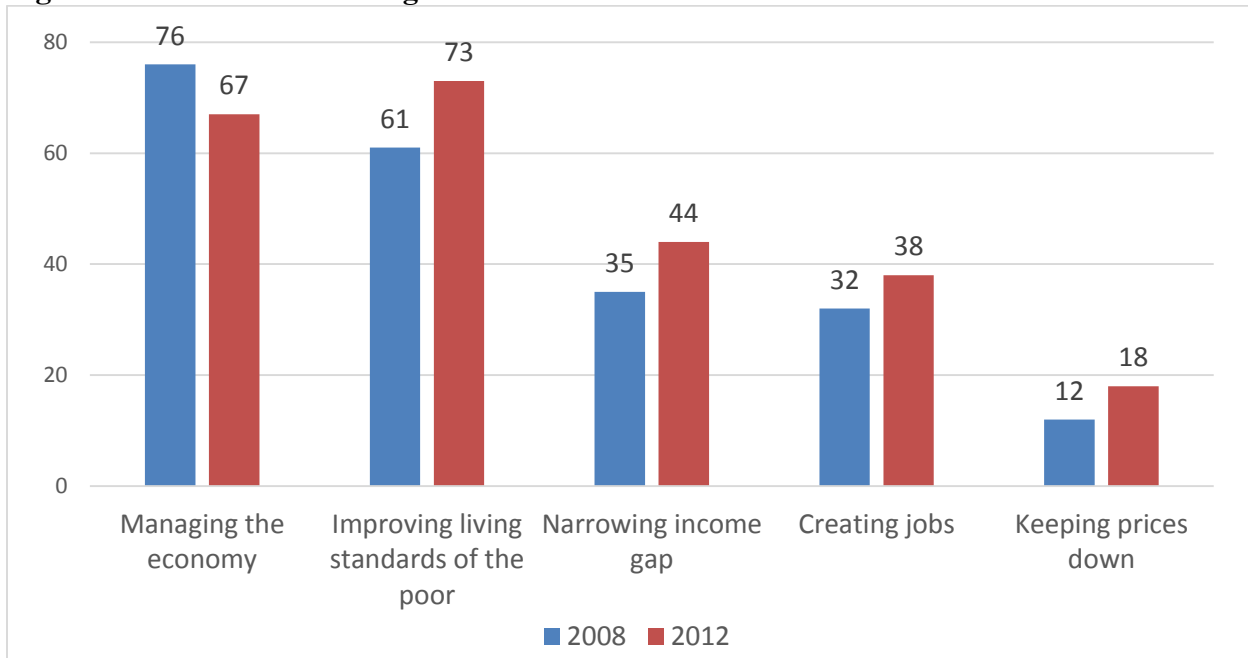
Afrobarometer fieldwork occurred at an interesting point in Botswana's political landscape. The legitimacy of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) under the leadership of President Ian Khama Seretse Khama was challenged by a split-away group that created a new political party called the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD). The BMD was anticipated to fracture the ruling BDP. In addition, there was industrial strife which culminated in the inability of the government and trade unions to forge a collective bargaining agreement. The failure to solve the labor dispute resulted in a national strike in 2011. It did not help that at the same time unemployment rates were high (30%) in 2012.

Afrobarometer asked respondents to say how well or badly the government is handling the economy in sixteen different performance areas. The government fared badly in three key areas in 2012, as it did in 2008: creating jobs, keeping prices down and narrowing the income gap. The government of Botswana has put in place multiple poverty reduction policies and programmes, including Ipelegeng, which is a project designed to provide short-term employment support and relief for unskilled and semi-skilled workers as well as for vulnerable members of the community. Nevertheless, the 2012 survey results suggest these programs have failed to ease Botswana's worries about the economy.

4. Economic Performance of the Government

Botswana's ratings of the government's economic performance slipped in 2012, with 67% of survey respondents approving or strongly approving of the government's economic management. This compares with 76% in 2008 (Figure 1).

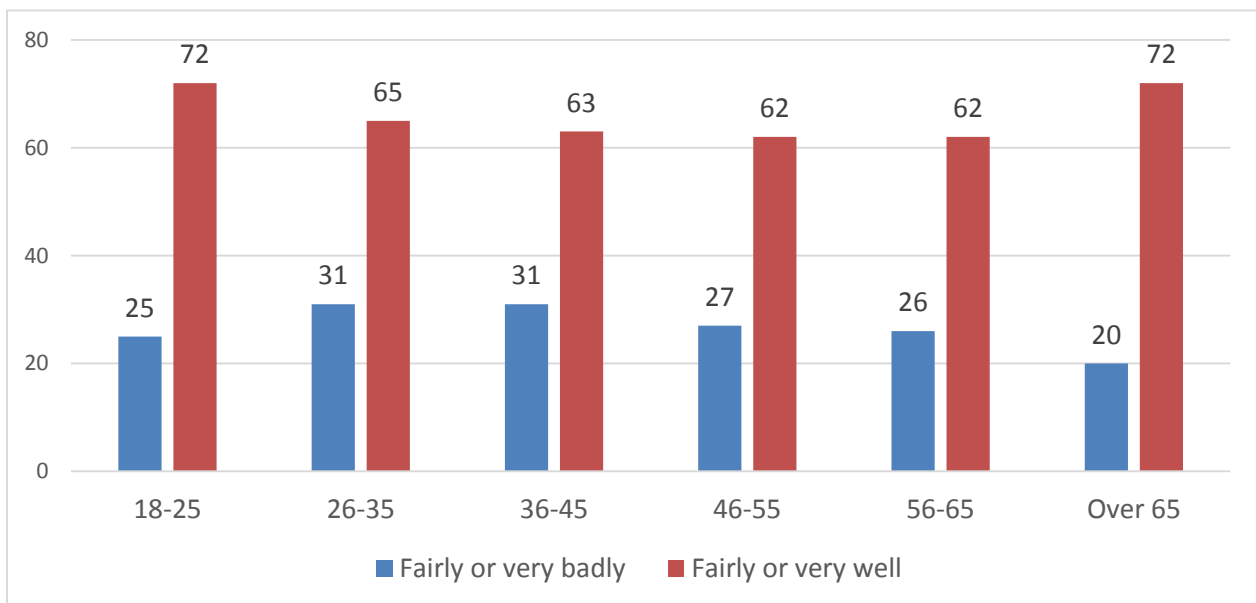
Figure 1: Performance Ratings of Botswana’s Government



Question: How well is the government handling the following tasks? (% of respondents who said “fairly well” or “very well”)

People of working age, from 26 to 35 and 36 to 45, were the most critical of the government’s economic management. One in three respondents (31%) from 26 to 35 and 36 to 45 years of age report that the government handled the economy badly.

Figure 2: Management of the Economy by Age

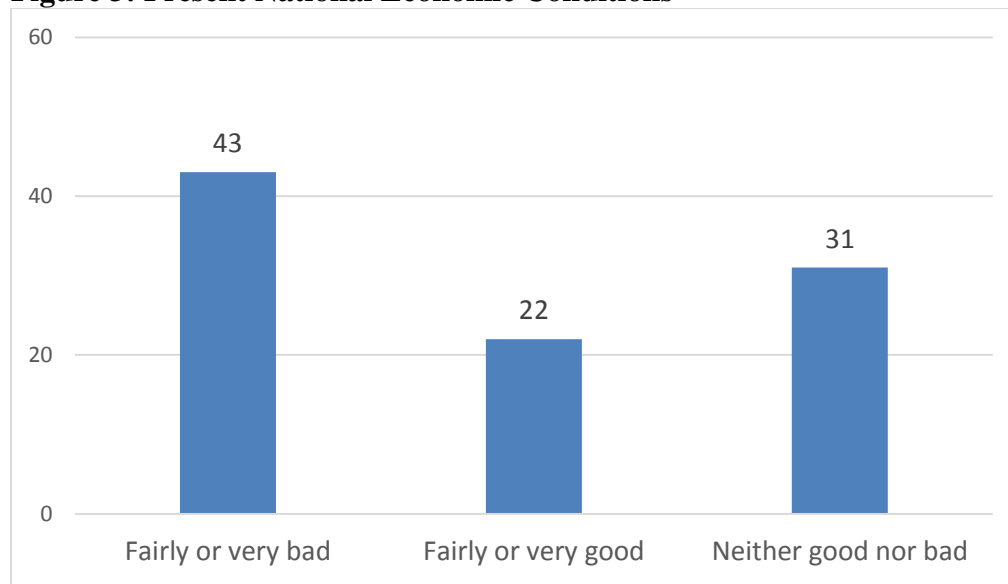


Question: How do you think the government is handling the economy? (% who said “fairly badly” or “very badly”; “fairly well” or “very well”)

The slightly higher approval of the government’s handling of the economy from Batswana aged 18 to 25 is interesting. It is often assumed that youth are more critical than their older counterparts. Often changes in government programmes that fail to address young peoples’ concerns are immediately met with vocal disappointment. One may have expected that young people would have given the government a low rating on the management of the economy. Factors that could account for the positive outlook of the youth, include the fact that government interventions have been pro-youth, such as Ipelegeng, Internship programme, Youth Development Fund, LIMID, and the Youth Empowerment Scheme. However, this does not necessarily mean that these schemes have all borne positive fruits. Currently, for example, young people are debating whether the Internship programme has achieved its employment objectives.

In terms of the national economic conditions, a sizable proportion of Batswana (43%) believe that Botswana’s present economic conditions are fairly or very bad (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Present National Economic Conditions



Question: In general, how would you describe the present economic conditions of this country? (% who said “fairly bad” or “very bad”; “fairly good” or “very good”; “neither good or bad”)

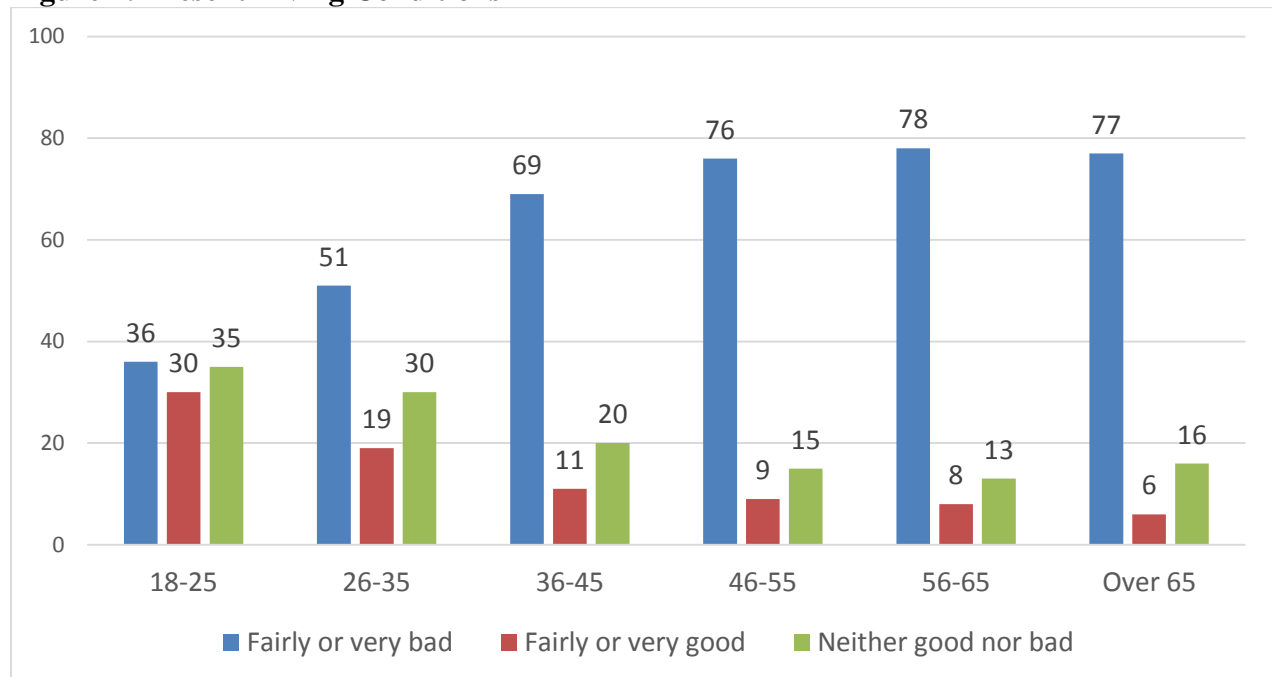
Interestingly, 36% of respondents who scored the government high on the management of the economy scored the country’s present economic condition as being fairly bad or very bad. There is an expectation that a high ranking of the management would mean a high ranking of the country’s present economic condition. However, there is a possibility that the ongoing economic recession could have something to do with it.

Segmenting the respondents by their age groups, we realize that up to 45% of the productive age group (aged 26 to 45) are of the view that the country economic conditions are either very bad or fairly bad. Meanwhile a lesser proportion of young Batswana (35%), aged 18-25, view the country economic conditions as being very bad or fairly bad.

5. Batswana Say Their Living Conditions are Bad

Turning to an individual's living conditions, a majority of the older generation (77%), aged 65 and older, seem to be of the view that their individual living conditions are either very bad or fairly bad. Overall, older respondents tended to view their present living conditions as very bad or fairly bad, whereas the proportions of young people with this opinion are much lower (i.e., 36% of Batswana aged 18 to 25) (Figure 4).

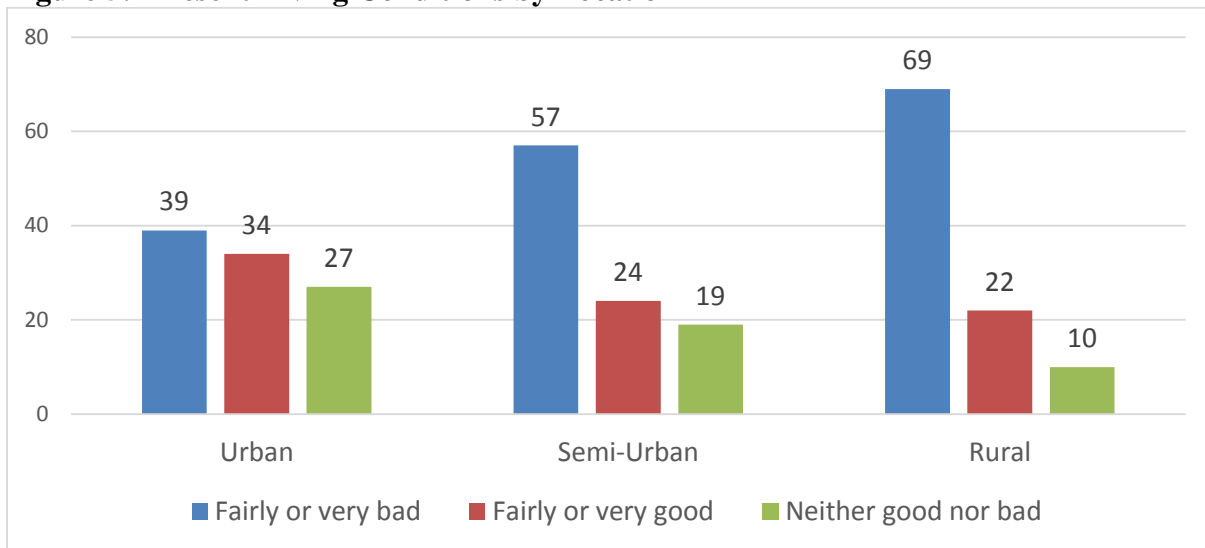
Figure 4: Present Living Conditions



Question: How would you describe your current living conditions? (% who said “fairly badly” or “very badly”; “fairly well” or “very well”; “neither good nor bad”)

While giving high performance ratings for the government's economic performance, respondents viewed their present living conditions more negatively. This is especially true among rural dwellers (Figure 5). Sixty-nine percent of rural people say their present living conditions are fairly bad or very bad, compared with 39% in urban areas. Urbanization of major villages is improving residents' living conditions to levels closer to those in urban areas. Urbanization involves infrastructural development, which possibly accounts for some of the perceptions of improved living conditions. Clearly, there is strong association between location and assessments of present living conditions, and the same goes for the outlook of the economy.

Figure 5: Present Living Conditions by Location



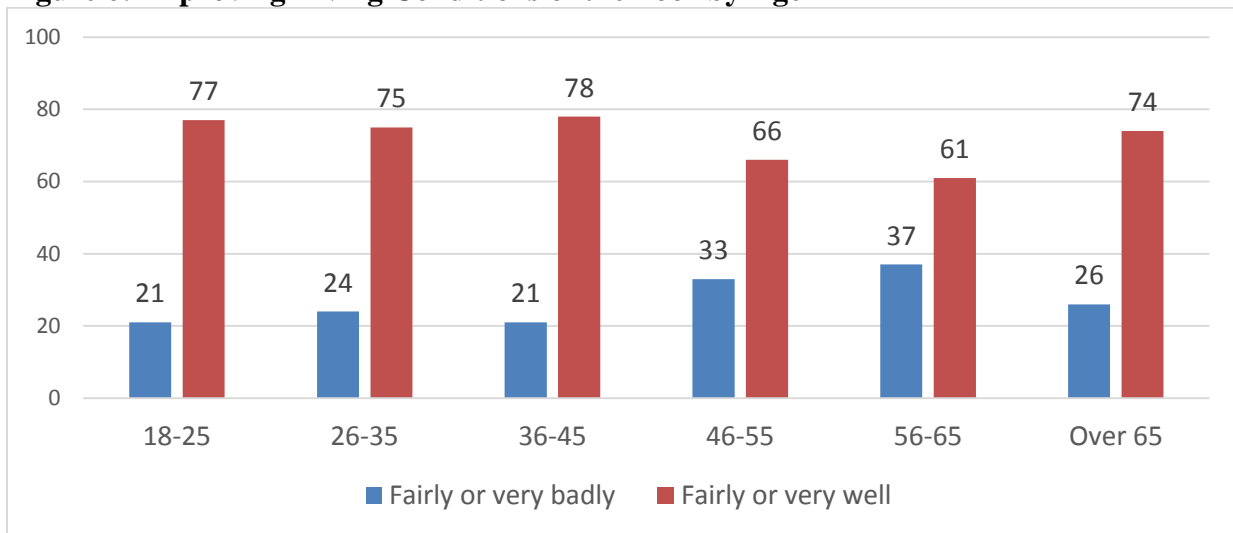
Question: How would you describe your current living conditions? (% who said “fairly bad” or “very bad”; “fairly good” or “very good”; “neither good nor bad”)

Perceptions of the Government Handles Improving Living Standards for Poor People

The oldest and youngest people diverge on their views of the government’s success in improving the living standards of the poor (Figure 6). Thirty-one percent of older respondents (aged 46 to over 65) say that government is failing to improve living standards, compared with just 22% of people under 46. The older generation is often relegated to living in rural areas where the majority of the poor live. Rural development continues to be a major policy of the government, but older respondents say that the government does not do enough to ameliorate conditions. Urban areas continue to benefit from infrastructural development such as paved roads and well developed and well-stocked hospitals. The classical divide between the rural and urban is stark. The disparity between conditions of rural and urban viewpoints would suggest that the rural poor would not vote for the ruling party, but that is not the case. Perhaps the ruling party’s populist programmes are responsible for the rural poor’s continued support.¹

¹ President Khama has been on a crusade to provide blankets and sit around the fire in the locality. The importance of the latter in Tswana tradition cannot be underestimated.

Figure 6: Improving Living Conditions of the Poor by Age

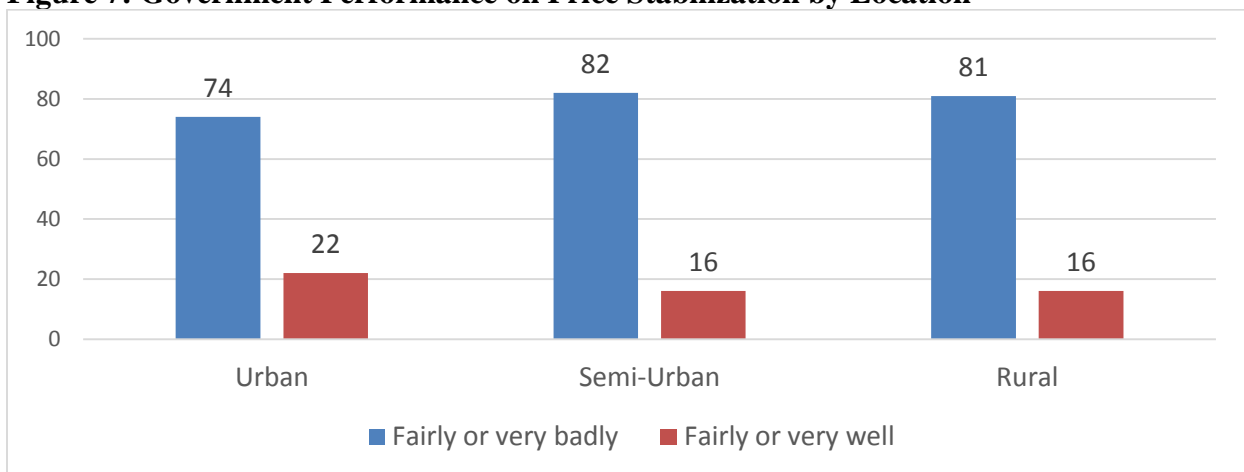


Question: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Improving the living standards of the poor? (% who said "fairly badly" or "very badly"; "fairly well" or "very well")

Rural and Urban Differences in Economic Performance

Rural and semi-urban districts feel the pinch of increasing the prices more than urban respondents do. Just over eighty percent of respondents from both rural and major villages (i.e., semi-urban locations) report that government is doing a bad job in keeping the prices down compared to 74% in urban areas (Figure 7). Rural areas have limited competition compared to urban areas. There are more shops vying for customers in the urban areas than in the rural areas. More often than not, the rural areas are dominated by monopoly chain stores that fix prices. Botswana may be demanding that the government cushion the poor from business practices contributing to high prices.

Figure 7: Government Performance on Price Stabilization by Location



Question: How is the government handling price stabilization? (% who said "fairly badly" or "very badly"; "fairly well" or "very well")

6. Conclusion

The contradiction between assessments of the Botswana government's economic management and its handling of social issues raises a number of concerns. Economic performance does not imply that living conditions of individuals will be improved. The Afrobarometer survey data suggests that there is a gap between rural and urban living standards and between those who have benefitted from the government's highly praised economic management and those who have not.

References

Government of Botswana (2013) *Budget Speech*, Gaborone: Government Printers

Samatar, A. (1999) *An African Miracle: State and Class Leadership and Colonial Legacy in Botswana Development*, Portsmouth: Heinemann

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Gladys Mokhawa, National Investigator at the University of Botswana. Email: mokhawa@mopipi.ub.bw

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Survey implementation in Lesotho, including preparations, data collection and management and overall project coordination, was undertaken by Advision Lesotho. We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank for Afrobarometer Round 5. For more information and further requests for analysis please visit Afrobarometer website: www.afrobarometer.org or contact Anyway Chingwete on achingwete.ab@gmail.com