Botswana (The Shining Jewel of Africa)

Introduction
The country of Botswana is unique among the other African nations. Since its independence, Botswana has been able to make economic progress when so many African countries have failed. Now, it is considered the shining jewel of Africa due to its rapid economic progress. However, Botswana is a country of contrast and this jewel of Africa does not shine as bright for some as it does for others.

Location
The country of Botswana, which is slightly smaller than Texas, is located in southeast Africa. The area of the country of Botswana is 600,370 square kilometers, of which only 15,000 square kilometers is covered by water. It straddles the Tropic of Capricorn and lays between latitudes 17 and 27 and longitudes 20 and 30 east. Botswana borders Namibia to its north and west, Zimbabwe to its northeast and east, and South Africa to its south and southeast. The most prominent feature of Botswana’s location is that it is completely landlocked.

Geography/Topography
The terrain located within the borders of Botswana ranges from flat land to gently rolling hills.

The lowest point in Botswana is located at the junction of the Limpopo River and Shashe River at the height of 513 meters. In contrast, the highest point is located in the Tsodilo Hills at 1,489 meters high.

The Kalahari Desert is located in the southwest corner of the country. During the month of August, the wind blows from the west and there is an increased chance of it carrying sand and dust particles from this desert into populated areas. This could lead to desertification of some areas when coupled with overgrazing. The Okavango Delta, which provides sustenance to a wide variety of wildlife, creates an oasis in the Kalahari Desert. This delta is one of the largest in the world and is formed by the
Okavango River that is located in the northwest portion of the country. However, this oasis is an exception rather than the rule for the geography of the western part of the country. Due to these harsh conditions of the western part of the country, the population of Botswana is concentrated in the eastern part of the country.

**Climate**

Botswana’s climate is considered to be semiarid/subtropical. It has warm winters and hot summers. The temperatures in the winter can range from 5 to 23 degrees Celsius and in the summer they can range from 19 to 33 degrees Celsius. The summer season begins in November and ends in March. The winter season begins in May and ends in August. The rainy season is during the summer season with the peak months of January and February. The average amount of rainfall can range from a maximum of over 650 mm in the extreme northeast area to a minimum of less than 250 mm in the southwest. Rainfall is highly erratic and regional and parts of Botswana are affected by droughts. When these droughts are coupled with the fact that less than one percent of the land is irrigated and access to fresh water is limited, it causes a large negative impact on the people of Botswana. These droughts cause a shortage of grazing lands, which can seriously impact their beef export industry, as well as their own livelihood. With only one percent of the land irrigated, the farmers of Botswana depend heavily on the rain for their crops.

**History**

In 1806, hunters, traders, and missionaries began to arrive in Botswana. Due to the industrial revolution in Europe, there was a need for new markets and raw materials. The hunters that came to Botswana were in search of game from South Africa. However, they struggled because the animals began to disappear, unable to withstand the mass slaughter by these hunters. Missionaries were important in the lives of Batswana (The people of Botswana) because they would act as mediators in
disputes with other white men. As expected, the missionaries brought Christianity to the country, which today is central to many Batswana lives.

Due to the constant raids and expansion by the Boers, Botswana turned to the British for aid. They considered the British being the lesser of two evils. The British reluctantly agreed to annex Botswana because they feared that the Germans would begin an attempt to block concessions from Ndebele in Zimbabwe. In March 1885, a Brimsa protectorate was declared over Bechuanaland (British name for Botswana) and the present day borders of Botswana were defined. However, the Batswana Chiefs were beginning to become even unhappier with their new rulers as time progressed. This is due to the fact that they had always wanted to protect their power from the British government and wanted to rule their people as they saw fit and not according to the whims and wishes of the British government. This conflict was considered the beginnings of the struggle for independence. In 1930, the chiefs were becoming more and more restless and wanted more than just national symbols like flags, but also self-government rights over their tribes. The chiefs would have to wait another 25 years before the protectorate was granted internal self-government in 1965. The republic of Botswana became completely independent on September 20, 1966.

The independence and economic success of Botswana is a rare story on the African continent. Only 20 years ago, it was one of the poorest countries in the world with a Gross National Product (GNP) per capita of only $80. Now it is considered the richest, non-oil producing country in Africa. The event that helped to trigger the upward swing in its economy was the discovery of diamond deposits in the 1970’s. Usually, there is a “curse” associated with newly discovered resources. This “curse” is actually a trend where countries that have acquired a lot of unexpected income quickly, such as newly discovered diamond mines, have eventually became even poorer.
The best example of this was when oil was discovered in the countries of Ecuador and Nigeria. These countries became wealthy quickly. However, the citizens became very greedy and did not plan for the future by developing means to sustain this wealth. Eventually, the funds were invested so inefficiently that there were no foundations created to continue on the production of oil. Finally, the government officials of these countries removed integral policies relying on the notion that they would always be rich. Eventually, the income from the oil fields became depleted and since the country had nothing to fall back on and was too far extended, it led to a poorer fate.

Botswana was able to avoid this future by practicing sustainable development. This is where one does not consume more than a future generation can consume. This insures that there will be enough resources left so future generations are guaranteed to be as productive as the current one. Botswana’s commitment to its future is emphasized by the Opara 2000 project, which doubled the capacity of Botswana’s main diamond mine, and through its continuation has proven legislature, such as taxation, by the government.

**Important Dates**

Since Botswana is a relatively new country, there are very few dates that are celebrated or recognized by the government. However, many of the dates celebrated here in the United States are celebrated in Botswana. The following is a list of dates and holidays celebrated in Botswana: 1 January (New Year's Day), 2 January (Public Holiday), 13 April (Good Friday), 14 April (Public Holiday), 16 April (Easter Monday), 1 May (Labor Day), 24 May (Ascension Day), 1 July (Sir Seretse Khama Day), 16 July (President Day), 17 July (Public Holiday), 30 September (Botswana Day), 1 October (Public Holiday), and 25 December (Christmas Day). The most important date to the country of Botswana is the date of its independence from Britain, which was September 30, 1966. Due to the fact that half of its citizens are of Christian faith, the holidays of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter are celebrated. Another important
date is the establishment of the Botswana Postal Services in November 1989. This date is included because with a postal service, the Batswana were now able to communicate with relative ease with one another and this has helped strengthen the country as a whole.

**Population**

The total population of Botswana is 1,576,470 people, which is only .578% of the total population located within the United States. This entire population is about the same size as the population located within the metropolitan area of Columbus, Ohio. More than half of the total population is located in rural settings. When compared to twenty years ago and only 15% of the population lived in an urban area, this is a dramatic increase. This is probably due to the fact that many people are migrating to the city in search of work and better standards of living. The capital city of Botswana, Gaborone, has a population of approximately 134,000 people and is increasing steadily due to the influx of immigrants from the rural areas. Finally, there are five major ethnic groups recognized by the government. The vast majority of the inhabitants of Botswana are a part of the ethnic group Tswana (or Setswana) (79%). The Kalanga (11%), Basarwa (3%), and other (7%) (Kgalagadi and white) make up the remaining 21% of the total population.

Botswana, like many sub-Saharan countries, is facing a major epidemic. This epidemic is the spread of HIV, which is the virus that causes AIDS. This health issue is running rampant throughout the countryside and has dramatically altered the population makeup of this country. As of 1999, the prevalence of AIDS in Botswana is 35.8%. Due to this epidemic, the average population growth rate is only .76% and the life expectancy of the people of Botswana is only 39.27 years. The age structure of the Botswana population is nearly split in half between children, which are between the ages of 0-14 years old, and makeup 41%, and those 15-64 years old who make up 55% of the total population. Until
this epidemic is under control, the success of Botswana as a whole will be in great jeopardy and may lead to the destruction of the country that has made many great strides in the right direction.

**Currency**

The currency of Botswana is that of the pula (P), which is similar to our dollar in function, and the thebe, which is similar to our penny in function. One hundred thebe equals one pula.

Approximately, 4.6168 pulas are equal to one US dollar.

**Education**

With the successful growth of the economy of Botswana, the public expenditure on education grew. As the government allocated more funds to education, there was an increase in the percentage of the total population attending primary education, which is now up to 80%. Even more impressive was the 49% growth in enrollment of the population into secondary education. As of 1997, men and women graduate with an average of 12 years of schooling. However, the adult literacy rate is lower in females (59.9%) than in males (80.5%) and the overall literacy rate for the total population is 69.8%. The University of Botswana has made an attempt to increase literacy by connecting the libraries of Botswana into an online service. The system created is similar to the ones offered here in the United States. These increases in education are very promising for Botswana. This is because the more educated the people are as a whole, the better they will be able to handle their own affairs, which could include the government, economy, and foreign relationships.

**Language**

Recently, the official language was changed to Setswana. However, English is spoken as well due to the fact that it was previously a British colony. Even though only the government recognizes
these two languages, there are several different languages spoken by those that live in the tribes in the rural region of Botswana.

**Religion**

The religion of Botswana is split approximately into two main categories. Fifty percent of the population is Christian and the other fifty percent maintain their indigenous or tribal beliefs. As mentioned earlier, missionaries came to the country very early with the explorers and are responsible for the spread of Christianity among the citizens of Botswana.

**Agriculture**

The agriculture of Botswana is largely made up of subsistence farming and cattle. The people of Botswana plant a wide variety of crops such as the following: sorghum, corn, millet, pulses, groundnuts (peanuts), beans, cowpeas, and sunflower seeds. The climate in Botswana has a large and direct effect on the type of agriculture conducted by the country. The lack of irrigation, poor soil, and limited access to fresh water are huge problems for the country of Botswana to overcome. The success or failure to overcome these obstacles is of great importance for most of the population of Botswana. This is due to the fact that 80% of the population either farms or raises cattle. However, agriculture only accounts for 3% of the GDP and produces only 50% of the food eaten by the population of Botswana.

**Trade**

A large majority (74%) of Botswana’s exports are shipped to the European Union. The remaining exports are sent to Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and Zimbabwe with 21% of the exports heading to SACU and 3% traveling to Zimbabwe. Diamonds make up the largest amount of the exports sent out of Botswana at 72%. Also, shipped out of Botswana are the following: vehicles, copper, nickel and meat. Due to the recent outbreak of Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE or “Mad Cow Disease”) in
Europe, it is expected that the exporting of meat to the European Union will increase dramatically. As of 1999, Botswana exported nearly $2.36 billion worth of goods.

Even though Botswana exports a large amount of products to the European Union, imports from the European Union make up only 8% of the total amount of products received from other countries. Botswana receives nearly 80% of its imports from SACU. This is probably due to two major factors. First, South Africa is a relatively stable and industrialized country. Second, Botswana is landlocked and due to South Africa’s location at the tip of the continent, it is one of the more direct routes for goods to flow.

**Food**

As mentioned earlier, a large proportion of the population located within Botswana are subsistence farmers. Therefore, they eat mainly what they grow and their diets consist of corn, millet, beans, and other livestock (mainly cattle). Although, if you travel to the big cities, you will find some of the cuisine very similar to many of the places in the United States, but with a little of the local flavor added.

**Landmarks**

There are a handful of sites to visit and tour in Botswana. The sites largely revolve around the viewing of wildlife in its most natural state, as well as, the environment unspoiled by mankind. This is due to the fact that conditions are harsh for people to inhabit and thrive. Therefore, large portions of the western part of Botswana are nearly untouched by mankind. For instance, the Okavango Delta attracts thousands of tourists throughout the year. This is because the delta creates a multitude of different and unique landscapes within a relatively small area. The landscapes can range from deserts to wetlands. The delta contains marshes, rivers, grasslands, palms, flood plains, and lagoons. This is all a part of the contrast that can be found within Botswana. The top two popular game reserves to visit are
the following: Moremi Game Reserve and Chobe National Park Reserve. They offer the tourist the opportunity to game-watch, bird-watch, hunt, and fish on the grounds of the reserve.

**Conclusion**

Botswana is a unique country in the southern tip of Africa. It has been able to succeed where so many countries have failed when they became independent. They have been able to improve their economy from one of the poorest nations in the world to one of the fastest growing, richest countries of Africa. Despite these great strides toward improving their development status, Botswana has a few obstacles to overcome before it can be come truly successful. The major problem affecting Botswana is the AIDS epidemic. This epidemic has affected almost every aspect of this country and has the chance of destroying everything that the past generation of Botswana citizens have worked so hard to create. Along with this outbreak, Botswana must continue to develop its citizens and allow them to be able to enjoy the fruits of the recent economic growth. I feel that Botswana has nearly completed an impossible task and is truly a story of rags to riches. However, I believe that everyone in that country needs to be able to experience this transformation for it to continue to occur. It is hoped they will be able to accomplish the tasks they have ahead of them and continue to be the shining jewel of Africa.

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