

National and Community Efforts to Improve the Wellbeing of Children in Botswana

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Abstract: Children are particularly vulnerable to social, economic, and developmental challenges and therefore require deliberate efforts to protect their rights and wellbeing. This paper examines national and community efforts to improve the wellbeing of children in Botswana, the challenges affecting these efforts, and lessons that may be relevant to other African countries. The study is guided by a Rights-Based Approach, which views children as rights holders and emphasizes the responsibility of duty bearers to promote, protect, and fulfil their rights. The study employed a secondary data, including relevant literature, policy documents, legislation, and government reports. The findings indicate that Botswana has made significant efforts through policies, legislation, social protection programmes, and community based initiatives to improve children's wellbeing. Noticeably, challenges related to implementation, resource constraints, and coordination among stakeholders continue to affect the realization of children's rights. The paper recommends strengthening policy implementation and monitoring, improving coordination among stakeholders, increasing resources for child protection and social services, and promoting children's participation in decisions affecting their lives.

Keywords: child wellbeing; child protection; best practices; policy implementation

1 Introduction

The wellbeing of children remains an important social policy and social work concern in Botswana, reflecting the responsibility of the state and other social actors to ensure that children grow and develop in safe, supportive and enabling environments. Botswana, an upper middle income country in Southern Africa, had a population of 2,359,609 according to the 2022 Population and Housing Census (Statistics Botswana, 2025). Since independence in 1966, the country has experienced sustained economic development and political stability, which have provided relatively favourable conditions for the development and implementation of social policies and programmes (Hillbom & Bolt, 2018). These structural conditions are important for children's wellbeing because political stability and institutional continuity can facilitate long-term investment in education, health, social protection and child protection systems. Botswana's development trajectory has nevertheless been characterised by significant social and economic inequalities. However, Lekobane (2022) argues that economic growth alone does not necessarily translate into equitable improvements in children's wellbeing, particularly where poverty, household vulnerability and unequal access to social services persist.

From a child rights perspective, the wellbeing of children therefore needs to be understood not only in terms of economic development and service provision, but also in relation to children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation (Lloyd & Emerson, 2017). This distinction is important because children may remain vulnerable even in relatively stable and economically developed societies. The absence of armed conflict or political instability may create an enabling environment for social development, but it does not in itself guarantee the effective realisation of children's rights (Cummings et al., 2017). The extent to which children benefit from national development is also influenced by the accessibility, adequacy and responsiveness of social protection, education, health and child protection systems. Botswana has consequently developed a range of legislative, policy and institutional mechanisms aimed at promoting and protecting children's wellbeing (Chinyeka, 2019). These include social protection interventions, child protection measures and programmes targeting vulnerable children and families.

Social welfare interventions have included financial assistance, psychosocial and counselling support, and measures directed towards children with disabilities and other groups experiencing heightened vulnerability (Ntseane & Solo, 2023). Such interventions reflect an increasing recognition that children's wellbeing is closely connected to the social and economic circumstances of their families and communities. From a social work point of view, this reinforces the importance of interventions that address both individual and family needs and the broader structural conditions that shape children's life chances. Botswana has also established legislation and policies intended to strengthen the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, neglect and trafficking (Ramabu, 2021). It can be argued that these developments demonstrate Botswana's commitment to creating an institutional and legal environment in which children's rights can be protected.

Norton, Conway & Foster (2002) assert that the existence of legislation and policy does not necessarily translate into effective protection and improved wellbeing. Therefore, attention needs to extend beyond the existence of policies and programmes to an examination of how effectively these measures are implemented at national and community levels. This distinction is particularly important in the Botswana context, where national development achievements coexist with continuing challenges affecting vulnerable children and families. A comprehensive understanding of children's wellbeing therefore requires consideration of the interaction between national policy, social protection systems, community structures and the everyday experiences of children.

Against this background, this paper examines national and community efforts to improve the wellbeing of children in Botswana. It considers the extent to which existing policies, programmes and community based interventions reflect a child rights-based understanding of wellbeing and contribute to the protection, development and participation of children. The paper seeks to move beyond a description of existing interventions and critically examine the opportunities and challenges associated with translating Botswana's commitments to children's rights into meaningful improvements in children's everyday lives.

2 Literature Review: Efforts to Improve the Wellbeing of Children in Botswana

Children in Botswana constitute a diverse population whose experiences of childhood are shaped by age, gender, socioeconomic circumstances, family structure, geographical location, disability, educational opportunities and other social and cultural factors (UNICEF, 2024). Childhood is therefore not experienced uniformly, and children's wellbeing needs to be understood within the social, economic and cultural environments in which they live. Ntseane

& Solo (2007) emphasise the diversity of social and cultural experiences within Botswana, suggesting that interventions designed to improve children's wellbeing need to be responsive to differences in children's circumstances rather than treating children as a homogeneous category. This recognition is particularly important because children's vulnerabilities and access to resources are mediated by family, community and wider structural conditions (Maundeni, Jankey & Levers, 2018). It is worth to note that Botswana has established legal and policy foundation for the protection and promotion of children's rights.

The country's constitutional framework provides for fundamental rights and freedoms, while its commitment to international child rights standards has been demonstrated through its ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC represents an important shift from viewing children primarily as recipients of welfare and protection towards recognising them as rights holders entitled to protection, provision, development and participation (Desai, 2010). Botswana's commitment to these principles has subsequently been reflected in legislation, policies and programmes addressing child protection, education, health, social protection and the needs of children experiencing particular vulnerabilities (Ramabu, 2021). The institutional environment within which children's programmes are implemented is also significant. According to Mothusi, Molokwane & Ruele (2018) Botswana has over the years recognised the importance of collaboration between government and civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs).

The Ministry of Local Government has acknowledged the contribution of NGOs to the development and implementation of programmes for children (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2017). Such collaboration is important because government institutions alone may not possess the resources, expertise or community reach required to respond comprehensively to the diverse needs of children (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2017). Maundeni (2009) further noted that the involvement of civil society organisations in processes such as the review of child related legislation also illustrates the potential for multi-sectoral participation in child policy development. Government support for civil society organisations further demonstrates the institutional recognition of their role in social development. Botswana has also implemented a range of interventions addressing children's health, protection and social wellbeing. These include childhood immunisation, infant and young child feeding interventions, support for orphaned and vulnerable children, and programmes aimed at preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV (Gona et al., 2020). Such interventions are particularly significant in the Botswana context given the historical impact of HIV and AIDS on children, families and communities.

The expansion of health and social protection interventions demonstrates the extent to which child wellbeing has been incorporated into national development priorities. These interventions also illustrate the interconnected nature of children's rights: health, nutrition, family care, protection and development cannot be addressed effectively in isolation (Samboma, 2020). Even though there are these policy and institutional achievements, the existence of legislation, programmes and formal commitments does not necessarily guarantee the realisation of children's rights in practice. A central concern in the literature on child rights is the implementation gap between formal policy commitments and children's lived experiences. Rights may be recognised in legislation while structural poverty, household vulnerability, unequal access to services, limited institutional capacity and other socioeconomic conditions continue to constrain children's wellbeing. This distinction is

particularly relevant in contexts where national development indicators may mask inequalities experienced by particular groups of children.

Therefore, this paper argues that assessing children's wellbeing requires attention not only to whether policies and programmes exist, but also to their accessibility, adequacy, implementation and impact at household and community levels. Noticeably, scholars in Botswana (Malinga & Ntshwarang, 2011; Leite, 2013; Chinyeka, 2019) present a complex picture of children's wellbeing. On the one hand, the country has developed important legal, policy and institutional mechanisms, established partnerships with civil society, and implemented programmes addressing children's health, protection and social welfare. On the other hand, these achievements should not be interpreted as evidence that all children experience equal levels of wellbeing or that children's rights are consistently realised. The diversity of children's circumstances means that the effectiveness of interventions may vary across social and geographical contexts (Diraditsile, Maundeni & Keadile, 2026).

This highlights the importance of examining how national policies and programmes are translated into community level practice and how different stakeholders contribute to the realisation of children's rights. Considering the foregoing, this paper approaches efforts to improve children's wellbeing not simply in terms of the number of policies and programmes established, but in terms of the extent to which these interventions reflect a child rights-based approach. Particular attention is therefore given to the relationship between policy commitments, institutional and community partnerships, service provision, participation and the practical realisation of children's rights.

2.1 Legislation and Policy Initiatives

As mentioned previously, Botswana has established a relatively comprehensive legislative and policy framework for the protection and promotion of children's rights and wellbeing. A major development was the enactment of the Children's Act (Cap. 28:04) of 2009, which the Government describes as the principal legislation for the promotion and protection of children's rights and their general wellbeing (Ramabu, 2021). The Act was intended to give domestic effect to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and provides children with a range of rights and protections, including the right to birth registration and nationality, protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation, and mechanisms for children requiring care and protection (Leite, 2013). The significance of the Children's Act, therefore, lies not simply in the fact that Botswana enacted legislation following its commitment to the CRC, but in the way in which it establishes institutional and procedural mechanisms through which children's rights are to be realised.

The implementation framework has included the establishment of child protection structures, dissemination of the Act, capacity building and institutional strengthening (Botlhale, 2015). The National Children's Council was also established as part of the institutional arrangements for coordinating child-related activities (Sloth-Nielsen, 2012). The Act consequently provides a legal basis for moving beyond a welfare-oriented conception of children towards a rights-based understanding of childhood (Ramabu, 2021). Its significance can be assessed against the four general principles of the CRC: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child (Ramabu, 2021). These principles require that children are not only protected from harm but also provided with opportunities to develop, participate in decisions affecting them and access services without discrimination. In this regard, the Children's Act provides an important foundation for operationalising the child rights-based approach adopted in this study.

Notably, the enactment of the Children's Act should not in itself be regarded as evidence that children's rights have been fully realised. The experience of Botswana demonstrates the distinction between legal recognition and practical implementation. Jobeta & Dinokopila (2018) indicates that implementation of the Children's Act remains multi-sectoral and operates at local, district and national levels, suggesting that its effectiveness depends substantially on the capacity and coordination of multiple actors. There are also indications that implementation has been constrained by institutional and resource limitations. The need for dedicated resources is significant because rights-based legislation requires more than statutory obligations; it requires institutions, personnel, monitoring systems and financial resources capable of translating those obligations into services and protection at community level. The effectiveness of the legislative framework has also been questioned in relation to the protection of children from violence and sexual abuse (Diraditsile, 2018).

Ramabu (2020) noted that although Botswana had amended the Penal Code in 2018 to strengthen protection against child sexual abuse and raise the age of sexual consent from 16 to 18 years, legislative reform had not necessarily translated into effective implementation in practice. This illustrates an important limitation of rights-based legislation, thus formal legal protection may exist while institutional practices, reporting mechanisms, access to justice and enforcement remain inadequate (Jobeta & Dinokopila, 2018). The Children's Act also operates within a wider legal and policy framework that includes the Constitution of Botswana, the Penal Code, the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, the Domestic Violence Act, education legislation and national development and social protection policies.

These instruments address different dimensions of children's wellbeing, including protection from violence and exploitation, access to education, family welfare and social protection. The Penal Code, for example, criminalises serious offences affecting children, while the Anti-Human Trafficking Act provides additional protection against exploitation and trafficking. The existence of multiple instruments is important because children's wellbeing is multidimensional and cannot be addressed through child protection legislation alone (Ramabu, 2020). Nevertheless, the coexistence of multiple laws also creates a need for harmonisation, coordination and consistent implementation. Botswana's engagement with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has highlighted the need to ensure that domestic laws and administrative measures affecting children are consistent with the Convention and that implementation is supported by appropriate institutional mechanisms.

3 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA) to development and policymaking to analyse national and community efforts to improve the wellbeing of children in Botswana. A rights-based approach to development provides a conceptual framework through which human rights principles are incorporated into development processes (Jonsson, 2005). However, rather than applying the approach in its broad sense, this paper specifically locates the analysis within a child rights framework, with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) providing the normative foundation. The CRBA conceptualises children as rights-holders and the state, families, communities, civil society organisations and other institutions as duty bearers responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling children's rights (Desai, 2018). The approach is guided by the four general principles of the UNCRC: non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6), and respect for the views of the child (Article 12).

These principles provide a basis for assessing whether policies and programmes intended to improve children's wellbeing address children's rights, promote equality and participation, and recognise children as active participants rather than passive beneficiaries of development interventions. This perspective complements the broader rights-based development principles of equality, equity, empowerment, participation and accountability identified by Jonsson (2005). To provide a more specific analytical framework, the paper draws on literature on child-rights-informed policymaking, particularly the framework developed by Sewpaul (2013), which identifies key dimensions of rights-based childhood policy, including the incorporation of children's rights principles into policy, children's participation, partnership and coordination, adequate public budgeting, rights impact assessment, and awareness of children's rights. This framework is useful for examining not only whether Botswana has established policies and programmes for children, but also the extent to which such efforts reflect rights-based principles in their formulation and implementation.

Children's participation is further understood through Lundy's Model of Child Participation, which conceptualises meaningful participation through four elements: space, voice, audience and influence (Moore, 2019). This provides a useful lens for examining whether children are provided with opportunities to express their views, whether decision-makers listen to those views, and whether children's perspectives have any influence on decisions affecting their wellbeing. The CRBA is particularly relevant to this study because the existence of legislation, policies and programmes does not necessarily guarantee the realisation of children's rights. The approach has been criticised for the gap that may exist between the formal recognition of rights and their implementation in practice (García-Villamil, 2021). Limited resources, institutional capacity, weak accountability mechanisms and implementation challenges may constrain the extent to which rights are realised. This therefore enables this study to examine both Botswana's commitments to children's rights and the extent to which these commitments have translated into effective national and community efforts to improve children's wellbeing.

4 Method

This study adopted a desktop review and literature review approach to examine national and community efforts to improve the wellbeing of children in Botswana. The review relied exclusively on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books and scholarly publications, Botswana government legislation and policy documents and national reports. Sources were identified based on their relevance to children's wellbeing, child protection, social welfare, child rights, social policy and community based interventions in Botswana. The review focused primarily on literature and policy documents that provided substantive evidence on Botswana's legislative, policy and institutional responses to children's wellbeing, while relevant international literature was incorporated to provide conceptual and comparative perspectives. As guided by Vartanian (2010) the analysis adopted a critical rather than purely descriptive approach, examining both progress and continuing gaps between formal policy commitments and their implementation in practice. Findings are synthesised across the reviewed sources to identify major achievements, persistent challenges and areas requiring further policy and practice attention. Given the reliance on publicly available secondary sources, no human participants were directly involved in the study; consequently, ethical approval for primary data collection was not required.

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Stakeholder Efforts to Improve the Wellbeing of Children

The findings indicate that the promotion and protection of children's wellbeing in Botswana involves a wide range of state and non-state actors, including lawyers, judges, policymakers, social workers, parents, teachers, nurses, psychologists, community members and members of child protection committees. Moreover, the findings also suggest that these stakeholders do not contribute to children's wellbeing in the same way or with the same degree of visibility (Botlhale, 2015). Some actors have direct and sustained contact with children, while others influence children's wellbeing through legislation, policy formulation, service provision, adjudication, community mobilisation and institutional oversight. This suggests that improving children's wellbeing is inherently a multisectoral responsibility that requires coordination among different duty bearers rather than the responsibility of a single profession or institution.

The prominence of social workers in the findings is particularly notable. Documents identified social workers as among the most visible professionals in the protection and promotion of children's rights, largely because of their direct engagement with children and families experiencing abuse, neglect, poverty, family breakdown and other forms of vulnerability. This is consistent with the broader social work literature, which positions social workers at the interface between individuals, families, communities and social institutions (Ntshwarang & Sewpaul, 2021). Their role extends beyond responding to individual cases to include advocacy, case management, family support, referral, prevention and mobilisation of resources. This positioning is particularly significant because social workers frequently operate where children's formally recognised rights intersect with the social and economic circumstances that constrain their ability to exercise those rights.

The prominent role of social workers is also reflected in Botswana's legislative framework. A review of the Children's Act demonstrates that social workers are assigned a range of responsibilities in relation to children requiring care and protection, including assessment, intervention, placement and monitoring. Their statutory position therefore provides an important institutional mechanism through which children's rights can be translated from legal principles into practical interventions (Maundeni et al., 2018). The finding is significant from a Rights-Based Approach which conceptualises children not merely as recipients of welfare or charitable assistance but as rights-holders, while government institutions and professionals are understood as duty bearers responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling those rights. The role of the social worker extends beyond providing assistance to vulnerable children; it includes advocating for children's rights, facilitating their participation in decisions affecting them and holding relevant institutions accountable for fulfilling their obligations (Ntseane & Solo, 2023).

This nevertheless demonstrate that social workers operate within a broader child protection system. Lawyers and judges, for example, contribute to the realisation of children's rights through legal representation, interpretation and enforcement of legislation, while policymakers establish the legislative and policy conditions within which child protection services operate (Jobeta & Dinokopila, 2018). Teachers and nurses are often among the first professionals to encounter children experiencing abuse, neglect, developmental difficulties or other forms of vulnerability and can therefore play an important role in early identification and referral. Psychologists contribute through assessment and therapeutic interventions, particularly where children have experienced trauma or other forms of psychosocial distress

(Maundeni & Lopez, 2005). Parents and caregivers remain central to children's everyday wellbeing because the family is ordinarily the primary environment in which children's rights to care, protection, development and participation are realised. Community based actors, including child protection committee members, similarly provide an important link between formal child-protection systems and local communities.

These findings support the argument in the child-rights literature that children's wellbeing cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the availability of services. Rather, wellbeing is shaped by the interaction between children's rights, family circumstances, community conditions, institutional arrangements and broader socioeconomic structures. A rights-based perspective is therefore useful because it shifts attention from whether children receive assistance to whether the systems responsible for them are fulfilling their obligations. Jonsson (2005), for example, argues that a rights-based approach places principles such as participation, non-discrimination, accountability and empowerment at the centre of development practice. Similarly, Sewpaul (2013) emphasises the relevance of human rights and social justice to social work practice, particularly in addressing structural conditions that produce and reproduce vulnerability.

Noticeably, a fragmented system can result in duplication, gaps in service provision, delayed referrals and limited accountability. Lloyd & Emerson (2017) notes that where different duty bearers operate independently, the formal recognition of children's rights may not necessarily translate into improved outcomes for children. These concerns reinforce the finding that the effectiveness of stakeholder interventions must be assessed not only by the existence of institutions and legislation but also by their capacity to translate statutory responsibilities into meaningful changes in children's lives.

This distinction is particularly important in interpreting the role of social workers. Although social workers in Botswana occupy a prominent position within the child protection system, their effectiveness is influenced by the broader institutional environment in which they operate (Lucas & Jongman, 2017). Heavy caseloads, inadequate resources, limited inter-agency coordination and gaps in specialised services may constrain their ability to provide comprehensive interventions (Diraditsile & Mabote, 2019). Thus, positioning social workers as central actors in child wellbeing should not lead to the assumption that responsibility can be transferred to the profession.

5.2 Programs and Strategies

The findings indicate that Botswana has implemented a range of programmes and strategies aimed at improving children's wellbeing, particularly through education, healthcare, psychosocial support and protection. The provision of free universal healthcare and subsidised education has increased children's access to essential services and created important opportunities for their development (Chilisa, 2010). Keeping children in school is particularly significant because education can reduce exposure to child labour and other forms of vulnerability while equipping children with skills for adulthood (Diraditsile, 2018). These initiatives represent an important fulfilment of the state's responsibility to progressively realise children's rights to survival, development and education. Noticeably, the findings also reveal important gaps in the coverage and inclusiveness of these programmes. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a particularly important example.

While education is recognised as a fundamental child right, the limited state commitment to ECCE has contributed to its provision being dominated by the private sector, making access

difficult for children from poorer households (Maundeni et al., 2018). Children enter primary school with unequal levels of preparedness, with those who could not access ECCE potentially disadvantaged in comparison with their peers (Madigele, 2021). This raises an important rights-based concern because unequal access to early learning can reproduce socioeconomic inequalities and undermine the principles of non-discrimination and equality central to both the CRC and the RBA. The findings further demonstrate efforts to address educational exclusion among vulnerable groups. Programmes such as Diphilana, the Girls Education Movement (GEM), school re-admission provisions for pregnant learners, hostels for children in remote areas, and back to school initiatives have expanded educational opportunities for children who might otherwise be excluded.

The evaluation of Diphilana, for example, indicates that the programme enabled many adolescent mothers to return to school (Ntshwarang & Malinga-Musamba, 2015). Similarly, GEM provides girls with opportunities to discuss challenges affecting their education and development. These interventions demonstrate movement from a universal provision of education towards more targeted strategies aimed at addressing barriers experienced by particular groups. However, their limited geographical coverage remains a concern, suggesting that the benefits of rights-promoting interventions are not equally accessible across the country.

The findings also show that Botswana has increasingly recognised that children's wellbeing extends beyond educational access. School based counselling, life-skills programmes, telephone counselling, the Peer Approach to Counselling Teenagers (PACT) and other initiatives provide children with avenues for support when experiencing social, emotional or family-related difficulties (Rapinyana et al., 2020). These interventions are consistent with the RBA because they recognise children as individuals with developmental, psychosocial and protection needs rather than merely as recipients of educational services.

Civil society organisations also emerged as important contributors to children's wellbeing. NGOs and community based organisations complement government interventions through service provision, advocacy and awareness raising (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2017). Organisations such as Childline Botswana and other church based and secular organisations have contributed to child protection and the promotion of children's rights (Chilisa, 2010). Their involvement is particularly important within an RBA because it broadens accountability for children's rights beyond the state and creates additional channels through which children and communities can seek support. Nevertheless, the concentration of many NGOs and services in urban areas limits their reach to children in remote and rural communities.

5.3 Discrepancy between culture and children's rights

The findings reveal a significant tension between the formal recognition of children's rights and cultural practices and beliefs that continue to influence how children are perceived and treated in Botswana. Although Botswana has ratified the CRC and enacted the Children's Act, the practical realisation of some children's rights remains difficult (Mothusi et al., 2018). This is consistent with earlier observations that awareness of children's rights among the general population remains limited (Madigele, 2021). Limited awareness reduces the capacity of children, parents and communities to claim rights and hold duty bearers accountable. The findings further suggest that cultural understandings of childhood can constrain the implementation of rights-based principles. Ntshwarang & Vishanthie (2021) argue that traditional practices and culturally embedded beliefs can influence the protection of children in Botswana and other African contexts.

Perceptions of children as subordinate to adults may conflict with the rights-based understanding of children as rights holders with agency and evolving capacities. This tension is particularly evident in relation to corporal punishment and child participation. Corporal punishment has historically been accepted as a legitimate form of discipline in Botswana, illustrating how socially accepted practices may persist alongside contemporary understandings of children's rights and dignity (Ntshwarang & Sewpaul, 2021). The tension was also evident during consultations surrounding the revision of the Children's Act, when some communities expressed resistance to proposals concerning corporal punishment and greater recognition of children's participation (Maundeni & Diraditsile, 2016). This finding is important because it demonstrates that domestication of the CRC is not simply a legal process. Laws may establish rights, but their effectiveness depends on whether communities, families and institutions accept and implement the principles underpinning those rights. The challenge is therefore one of translating formal rights into socially accepted practices.

Child participation provides another illustration of this gap. Although participation is a core principle of the CRC and an important component of the RBA, children in Botswana are not consistently provided with opportunities to express their views in family, community and institutional settings (Ramabu, 2020). The description of children as "seen but not heard" captures the continuing tension between traditional adult child relationships and the rights-based conception of children as active participants in matters affecting them (Maundeni, 2009). Mutsvara (2020) further observes that children's rights do not receive explicit constitutional protection in Botswana, which may contribute to the relatively weak visibility of children's rights within the broader legal framework. These findings demonstrate the limitations of relying on legislation alone to achieve children's wellbeing. The approach requires not only the recognition of children as rights holders but also the transformation of institutional and social relationships that prevent them from exercising those rights. As García-Villamil (2021) observes, rights-based approaches can be constrained by structural barriers that limit people's ability to benefit from development interventions.

5.4 Prevalence of Communicable Diseases and Children's Wellbeing

Findings indicate that communicable diseases, particularly HIV and AIDS and COVID-19, constitute an important challenge to children's wellbeing in Botswana. HIV remains particularly significant given its effects on children's health, family livelihoods and psychosocial wellbeing. Although Botswana has made considerable progress in preventing mother to child transmission through programmes integrated into antenatal care, the continuing burden of HIV among young people demonstrates that prevention and awareness efforts require sustained attention (Maundeni & Diraditsile, 2016). Limited knowledge about HIV among young people and difficulties in parent child communication about sexuality and health have been identified as continuing challenges (Ogbodo, 2020). These challenges extend beyond the right to health. Children affected by HIV may also experience poverty, stigma, family disruption and psychosocial difficulties, thereby affecting their rights to survival, development, protection and non-discrimination.

The findings therefore support the RBA argument that children's wellbeing is multidimensional and that the fulfilment of one right is often dependent on the fulfilment of others. Strengthening sexuality education, parent child communication and child friendly health services is consequently important not only for disease prevention but also for the broader realisation of children's rights (Ntshwarang & Malinga-Musamba, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the vulnerability of children to wider social and

economic disruptions. Reports of increased cases of child sexual abuse during the lockdown period illustrate how measures intended to control the spread of the disease could simultaneously expose some children to other forms of harm (Samboma, 2020). The loss of employment and income also increased household vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty, despite government interventions to provide food assistance (Lekobane & Roelen, 2020).

Such consequences are important from an RBA perspective because they demonstrate that emergency responses need to consider the multiple and interconnected rights and vulnerabilities of children, rather than focusing exclusively on disease containment. The findings also highlight the importance of informal and community based support systems. In Botswana, families often rely on relatives and community networks for childcare, food and other forms of assistance (Madigele, 2021). Social distancing and movement restrictions weakened some of these support mechanisms, leaving vulnerable families with fewer resources. This suggests that strengthening children's wellbeing during public health emergencies requires not only medical interventions but also social protection, psychosocial support and mechanisms for maintaining essential child-protection services.

6 Implications for Research, Society and Social Work Practice

The findings discussed in this paper have important implications for research, society and social work practice. They demonstrate that improving children's wellbeing requires more than the existence of legislation and programmes; it requires effective implementation, coordination among stakeholders and the creation of social environments in which children can meaningfully exercise their rights.

6.1 Implications for Research

There is a need for further research that examines the gap between the formal recognition of children's rights and their practical realisation. Future studies should move beyond assessing the existence of policies and programmes to examining their accessibility, implementation, effectiveness and outcomes for different groups of children. Particular attention should be given to children living in rural and remote communities, children with disabilities, children experiencing poverty, adolescent mothers and other groups that may experience barriers to accessing services. Research should also provide greater opportunity for children themselves to express their experiences and perspectives, consistent with the participation principle of the Rights-Based Approach.

6.2 Implications for Society

It can be deduced from the findings that the responsibility for children's wellbeing cannot rest with government and professional service providers alone (UNICEF, 2024). Henceforth, families, communities, traditional structures, schools, civil society organisations and children themselves have important roles to play. Greater public awareness of children's rights is therefore necessary to challenge practices that may conflict with principles of dignity, equality, non-discrimination and participation. Furthermore, community based awareness and dialogue are particularly important in addressing the tension between cultural practices and children's rights. Therefore, society should increasingly recognise children as rights holders whose views and interests should be considered in decisions affecting their lives.

6.3 Implications for Social Work Practice

The findings reaffirm the central role of social workers in promoting and protecting children's wellbeing. Thus, social work practice needs to extend beyond responding to individual cases of abuse, neglect and vulnerability towards greater emphasis on rights advocacy, prevention, community engagement and policy implementation. Moreover, social workers should work collaboratively with teachers, health professionals, legal practitioners, families and community structures to strengthen referral and child protection systems. Consistent with the Rights-Based Approach, social workers should also facilitate children's participation, advocate for non-discriminatory access to services and hold institutions accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities towards children. The findings suggested that social work has an important role in bridging the gap between children's rights as recognised in law and children's rights as experienced in everyday life (Ramabu, 2021). Hence, this paper argues that strengthening this role requires adequate resources, professional capacity, inter-agency coordination and greater involvement of children in decisions affecting their wellbeing.

7 Conclusion and way forward

This paper examined national and community efforts to improve the wellbeing of children in Botswana through a Rights-Based Approach. It has demonstrated that Botswana has made important progress through legislation, policies, programmes and institutional interventions aimed at promoting children's rights, education, health, protection and psychosocial wellbeing. It also reveals a persistent gap between the formal recognition of children's rights and their practical realisation. Cultural practices, limited awareness of children's rights, uneven access to services, inadequate implementation and the effects of social and public health crises continue to constrain children's wellbeing. The analysis further demonstrates that the existence of legislation and programmes does not necessarily guarantee improved outcomes for children. The effectiveness of these interventions depends on adequate resources, institutional capacity, coordination among stakeholders, accountability and meaningful participation of children. The experiences of HIV, AIDS and COVID-19 further illustrate the vulnerability of children to wider social, economic and health crises and the importance of integrated child protection and social support systems.

Going forward, Botswana needs to strengthen the implementation of existing child protection legislation and policies rather than focusing only on the development of additional instruments. Greater investment is required in child protection services, including the deployment of appropriately trained social workers and psychologists in schools and other settings where children can be identified and supported at an early stage. Clear implementation guidelines, adequate resources and stronger monitoring mechanisms are also necessary to ensure that policies and programmes translate into tangible improvements in children's lives. There is also a need for sustained public education on children's rights. Government, civil society organisations, schools, communities and traditional structures should work together to increase awareness of children's rights and address cultural practices that may undermine children's dignity, protection and participation.

To this end, improving children's wellbeing requires a shift from viewing children primarily as recipients of welfare services towards recognising them as rights holders and active participants in decisions affecting their lives. Botswana's efforts should therefore focus not only on providing services but also on addressing the social, cultural, economic and institutional conditions that create and reproduce children's vulnerability. Strengthening accountability, participation, equity and coordination across government, communities,

families and civil society will be essential for translating Botswana's commitments to children's rights into meaningful and sustainable improvements in children's wellbeing.

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