Plenary Session 2: How have countries reached the poor and those left behind and reached the furthest first?
Your Excellences

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Botswana has an impressive history of development planning at national and local levels. The country has also followed prudent fiscal policies that have made wise use of revenues from a narrow natural resource base to develop other sectors. All of these planning instruments and policies have supported Botswana’s transition from a poor to an upper middle income country (MIC).

2. This development approach, coupled with consistent investment of mineral revenues in infrastructure and social services like education, health and social welfare programmes have significantly alleviated aggregate levels of poverty. This is Government’s commitment to reach out to the poor and to ensure that no one is left behind.

3. Botswana launched her Vision 2036 document in September 2016. This afforded the country the opportunity to define its roadmap that will be instrumental in delivery of our national aspirations for the next 20 years. The all-encompassing theme of “Achieving Prosperity for All”, will guide the country towards an inclusive development path to be achieved through the expansion of the domestic economy while empowering citizens including those in rural areas to meaningfully participate in the development of Botswana.
4. Botswana also adopted her Eleventh National Development Plan (NDP 11) in December 2016 to guide the medium term economic development path for the country. The adoption of the plan is a first step towards the implementation of Vision 2036. The theme for NDP 11 is “Inclusive Growth for the Realisation of Sustainable Employment Creation and Poverty Eradication”.

5. Botswana is cognisant of the fact that much against our collective resolve as a nation, there are some segments of the population that are disadvantaged, marginalised and deserves targeted attention. The Government’s aim is to reach out to these communities through various schemes and initiatives to address their concerns and to allow the communities to actively participate and benefit in the development of the country’s economy as espoused by Vision 2036.

6. The Government of Botswana has adopted a number of targeting methods to reach specific population’s groups, such as direct individual or household assessments that include means testing, targeting populations in specific geographical locations, gender, age and socio-economic conditions. Some of these programmes are of a social protection nature whilst others are meant to economically empower beneficiaries to improve their livelihoods and graduate from poverty.

7. The means testing is mainly for the selection of destitute persons as per the Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons (2002) that defines who qualifies to be called a destitute person in the Botswana context. This follows a detailed assessment of a
number of socio-economic variables at both individual and family levels. This assessment also identifies needy students who are usually children of destitute persons.

8. To ensure that no one is left behind, Government is addressing the problems of poverty and destitution through programmes and projects that target the vulnerable and the less privileged members of the society. As at December 2017, support was given to 213,053 beneficiaries composing of 36,171 destitute persons, 33,306 Needy Students, 107,014 Old Age Pensioners, 1,560 World War II Veterans, 1,316 Community Home Based Care patients, 6,045 People Living with Disabilities and 27,641 Orphans with cash allowance, food basket and shelter and clothing/uniform.

9. Old age pensioners are not means tested. Every Motswana upon attaining the age of 65 regardless of their socio-economic status qualify for this allowance. World War II Veterans are also not means tested but qualify by virtue of having been enrolled during World War II. Their spouses and children below the age of 21 are also given this allowance. Orphans are also not means tested. The only requirement to qualify for assistance regardless of socio-economic status is that a child should have lost both parents if the parents were married or the mother if the mother was not married. Orphans are assisted by Government up to the age of 21.

10. Home Based Care patients are assisted on the basis of a recommendation by a Medical Practitioner. The socio economic status of the beneficiary is taken into consideration to qualify for assistance. People Living with Disabilities are also given a cash
allowance following an assessment by medical personnel of the classification of the degree. However, an assessment of their economic status is taken into consideration to qualify for the allowance. This programme is guided by the National Policy on Care for People with Disabilities (1996).

11. Government has also adopted an Affirmative Action Framework for Remote Area Communities in 2014 as a way to reach out to remote area communities. This Affirmative Action Framework and its implementation plan is informed by the Revised Remote Area Development Programe Policy (2009). This Framework show Government’s commitment to intensify implementation of programmes and projects that will provide and promote equal opportunities for the remote area communities. The Framework will further assist to minimize development gaps that exist between recognised remote area settlements and the rest of the country. This is one programme in Botswana that targets specific geographical locations.

12. The Labour Based Programme (Commonly here known as Ipelegeng), that is being implemented country-wide, is yet another Government programme that is meant to provide a source of income to the poor and unemployed. Since April 2017, a cumulative total of 515,196 beneficiaries have been engaged consisting of 353,968 females and 161,228 males, out of which 179,603 are youth.

13. The Government of Botswana has also developed targeted support to women through programmes and policies that ensure and accelerate their sustainable participation in socio-economic, political and cultural development; with the aim to address
disadvantages experienced by Women and other disadvantaged groups such as People living with disability and the Youth which hindered their effective participation in the economy.

14. Another Government’s initiative to address poverty is the provision of adequate and affordable housing as a basic need. This is done through the implementation of the National Housing Policy’s Low-Income Housing Programme. The programme, which contains 3 components: Self Help Housing Agency (SHHA) Home Improvement; Turnkey Development Scheme and Integrated Poverty Alleviation; and Housing Scheme, has seen Government disbursing a total of P220.8 million to fund 5,447 beneficiaries between 2008 and 2017. This programme is means tested as beneficiaries have to undergo an assessment to determine their socio-economic status as per guidelines provided.

15. The destitute persons housing programme is also another initiative by Government to provide housing for destitute persons. A target has been set to deliver 1,000 housing units annually, for both Rural Area Dwellers (RADs) and countrywide destitute housing. This programme is means tested and beneficiaries are assisted as per the Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons (2002). To demonstrate our commitment in this regard, government has already constructed 3,938 destitute houses since the 2009/10 financial year.

16. The Poverty Eradication Programme, housed and coordinated by the Office of the President is also an initiative by Government targeting the poor. This programme which is implemented country-wide provides small grants to individuals and groups to come up with sustainable economic empowerment projects that could uplift their livelihoods. The programme is means tested and
has an eligibility criteria as provided in the Poverty Eradication Implementation Guidelines that were last reviewed in 2016. The programme generally targets the resource poor.

17. The Vulnerable Groups and School Feeding is yet another programme established by Government to ensure that vulnerable groups and school pupils are provided with some means of sustenance. Although this programme is implemented countrywide in all Government schools, it makes a very big difference to those in rural areas where there are comparative high levels of poverty. This programme provides a single meal to all pupils during the day. During a drought year as declared by the President of the Republic from time to time following a country-wide assessment, a second meal is also provided to pupils in schools in remote area settlements as part of the Government’s drought mitigation initiatives.

18. In recent years there has been significant and increasingly polarising debate over what targeting methodology should be used for social protection programs, including universal methods that target everyone in a demographic category or methods that target just the poor. Within this debate there has been little attention paid to whether targeting methodologies deliver what they set out to achieve.

19. Social protection analysts often accept that simple methods, such as universal targeting, are relatively effective largely because their targeting criteria (such as age and gender) can be easily determined. Methods targeting the poor are more complex, especially in developing countries with large informal economies
which make it difficult to accurately assess incomes given that, for example, most people do not report how much they earn.

20. Other approaches to social protection propose different ways of targeting that may be easier to implement, socially less divisive and politically popular. For example, there are growing calls for developing countries to build social protection systems that direct resources to vulnerable groups such as older people, children, persons with disability and the unemployed on a universal basis.

21. Sound evidence exists that targeting vulnerable groups on a universal basis may generate a higher level of political support than an approach focused on developing large-scale ‘safety nets’ that may exclude a majority of the poor. While such universal targeting approaches have been adopted by many developed countries and an increasing number of developing countries, there are important trade-offs relative to other forms of targeting that need to be considered, relating to financial, social and political costs, and coverage of the poor.

22. The Government of Botswana will continue to engage stakeholders including Development Partners to evaluate our country’s targeting systems to ensure that no one is left behind. This will include the sustainability of such systems relative to the cost incurred and impact realised. Some of our programmes that have generated a lot of debate are the orphan care and old aged pension programmes. These two programmes are currently not means tested as I had stated earlier.

23. Cognisant of the different sentiments raised by different studies on targeting the poor, we are however happy to report that all
these initiatives by Government have yielded positive results. Recent figures by Statistics Botswana shows that poverty levels over the past five years (2009/10 to 2015/16) have declined. The proportion of people living below the poverty datum line has dropped by three (3) percent from 19.3 to 16.3 percent during the period. The proportion of those living in extreme poverty (below $1.90 a Day) has also reduced from 6.4 to 5.8 percent.

24. To ensure a coordinated and harmonized system of dealing with social protection programmes, the Botswana Government through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development with the technical assistance of the World Bank are at an advanced stage in the development of an automated Single Social Registry. This system, once in full operation will ensure that all beneficiaries are correctly identified throughout the country as well as trace all the social protection and empowerment programmes the beneficiary was assisted with by Government. Other related initiatives include the development of the National Social Protection Framework and Graduation Strategy.

25. Let me conclude by re-affirming Botswana's commitment to reaching out to the poor and to ensure that no one is left behind. Botswana is also committed to the eradication of poverty in all its forms through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its underlying Sustainable Development Goals. I can assure you that our national strategy office and the national statistical office continue to work towards setting up a robust monitoring and evaluation system that seeks to integrate targets and indicators of the national development frameworks with those of the SDGs.
I thank you for your kind attention.