

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Botswana Monthly Briefing January 2022

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#### Botswana Summary 11 January 2022

*Vice president Slumber Tsogwane assumes the role of acting president while President Mokgweetsi Masisi (2018-present) enters self-isolation after testing positive for Covid-19 during a routine testing procedure. Ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) secretary general and minister of employment, labour productivity and skills development Mpho Balopi resigns his cabinet post and is expected to quit his party position. The Bank of Botswana (BoB) (central bank) warns that the economic threat posed by the new Covid-19 variant, Omicron, is eating into available room to respond through fiscal and monetary policy. United Kingdom-headquartered diamond mining corporation De Beers expects the measures that it has put in place to cope with Covid-19 to shield it from Omicron's threat to trade. The Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) has reportedly collected P38.5 billion (\$3.3 billion) in taxes in the 2020-2021 financial year, setting it on course to reach the P40 billion (\$3.4 billion) target set by government.*

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#### VP Tsogwane becomes acting president as Masisi tests positive for Covid-19...

Vice president **Slumber Tsogwane** has assumed the role of acting president while President **Mokgweetsi Masisi** (2018-present) self-isolates after testing positive for **Covid-19** during a routine testing procedure.<sup>1</sup> Acting permanent secretary for government communications **John-Thomas Dipowe** said Masisi displayed no symptoms of illness and would continue to be monitored by his medical doctors.<sup>2</sup>

Positive results of Covid-19 testing have increased significantly in **Botswana** since the detection of the **Omicron** variant on 25 November (see *ARC Briefing Botswana December 2021*), to an average of 2,500 every three days from under 300 over the same period before Omicron.<sup>3</sup> However, health authorities said hospitalisations have not spiked. As of 6 January, the health ministry had recorded 232,432 cases of Covid-19 in Botswana's population of roughly 2.4 million, with 216,820 recoveries and 2,497 Covid-19-related deaths.<sup>4</sup>

Vaccination against Covid-19 continues, with the health ministry announcing on 29 December that it had reduced the age limit for vaccination to 12 years of age from 18, and would start to administer booster doses in due course.<sup>5</sup> Health ministry spokesperson **Shirley Mukamambo** said that the **Botswana Medicines Regulatory Authority (BOMRA)** would provide details of the phase four transition and booster dosing schedule in due course.<sup>6</sup> The ministry reported on 6 January that it had fully vaccinated 1,039,113 of the eligible population of 1.53 million Botswana, or 67.9% of the eligible population, while 1,176,847 had received a first dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, 76.9% of the eligible target population.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sunday Standard, 3 Jan 2022

<sup>2</sup> Reuters, 3 Jan 2022

<sup>3</sup> Reuters, 3 Jan 2022

<sup>4</sup> Covid-19 Task Force, 6 Jan 2022

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, 3 Jan 2022

<sup>6</sup> Mmegi, 30 December 2022

<sup>7</sup> Botswana Covid-19 Task Force, 6 Jan 2021

Botswana ended its Covid-19-induced State of Emergency (SoE) on 30 September; however, President Masisi emphasised this did not signal the end of the pandemic and encouraged Botswana to continue abiding by Covid-19 health protocols.<sup>8</sup>

All travellers to Botswana must have a printed medical certificate (in English) with a negative Covid-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test result issued no more than 72 hours before departure. Passengers are subject to medical screening upon arrival. However, travellers from high-risk countries may be required to quarantine at a designated facility at their own expense. Antigen (rapid) tests are available at the international airports and major land border crossings and testing centres around Botswana.

### ... amid turbulence in ruling BDP

Ruling **Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)** secretary general and minister of employment, labour productivity and skills development **Mpho Balopi** resigned his cabinet post on 24 December and is also expected to quit his party position.<sup>9</sup> According to a statement from the **Office of the President (OP)** released on 24 December, President Masisi accepted Balopi's resignation and thanked him for his excellent service in the executive and to the country.<sup>10</sup>

Balopi's resignation signals trouble in the ruling party, which suffered a humiliating defeat in local government by-elections on 19 December. The BDP secured only three seats in the 11 contested wards.<sup>11</sup> News publication **The Afrikanist** on 25 December noted:

*"[T]he BDP's defeat was in large part attributed to aggrieved councillors, some of whom are sympathetic to Balopi."*<sup>12</sup>

A local source told **Africa Risk Consulting (ARC)** that Balopi's resignation is a "big victory" for the president:

*"He has got rid of a major enemy but it's not good for the stability of the BDP or country. It is not a joke when a cabinet minister and party secretary general resigns."*<sup>13</sup>

The relationship between Balopi and Masisi reached an all-time low in 2020 when Masisi accused Balopi of leaking confidential information to former president **Ian Khama** (2008-2018), to whom he is reportedly sympathetic.<sup>14</sup> Balopi dismissed reports in October that he and Masisi had fallen out after the president reportedly chose the BDP's national strategy, communications and international relations committee without the secretary general's input, contrary to party practice (see *ARC Briefing Botswana October 2021*). Rumours have also been circulating that Balopi will challenge Masisi for the party presidency at the 2022 party national congress elections, the first since 2017.<sup>15</sup>

Local media publication **Mmegi** reported on 26 November that Balopi's family had urged him to resign to save his reputation and focus on his businesses, and not to contest any future party positions.<sup>16</sup> In October, vice president and party chairperson Slumber Tsogwane and a duo of party elders reportedly met with Balopi requesting him to step down.<sup>17</sup> However, Balopi released a statement on 24 December dispelling rumours that he would quit the BDP to join the opposition **Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC)**:

<sup>8</sup> Office of the President, 8 Nov 2021

<sup>9</sup> Mmegi, 24 Dec 2021

<sup>10</sup> Office of the President (OP), 24 Dec 2021

<sup>11</sup> The Pan Afrikanist, 25 Dec 2021

<sup>12</sup> The Pan Afrikanist, 25 Dec 2021

<sup>13</sup> ARC Source, local resident

<sup>14</sup> Mmegi, 24 Dec 2021

<sup>15</sup> Mmegi, 1 Oct 2021

<sup>16</sup> Mmegi, 26 Dec 2021

<sup>17</sup> Mmegi, 26 Dec 2021

*"I now move on to serving Batswana in other capacities - As MP for Gaborone North, I will have more time for my constituents. I will devote more time to the position of Secretary General of the BDP, the organization that I so dearly love."<sup>18</sup>*

### Central bank wary of Omicron threat...

The **Bank of Botswana (BoB)** (central bank) warns that the economic threat posed by the new Covid-19 variant, Omicron, is eating into available room to respond through fiscal and monetary policy.<sup>19</sup> When Covid-19 first reached Botswana in March 2020, the BoB implemented several measures such as lowering the prudential capital adequacy ratio for banks, raising the limits on mobile money transactions, reducing banks' cost of accessing overnight funding and cutting interest rates to a record low of 3.75% in order to support economic recovery.<sup>20</sup> However, BoB governor **Moses Pelaelo** on 2 December said that unlike in March 2020, the room for policy responses to any economic threats is now "*significantly reduced*":<sup>21</sup>

*"What happened in the 19 months since then [March 2020] has reduced that policy space significantly both in terms of the public finance position given where the deficits are today and also in terms of monetary policy...One complicating story is the short-term developments in inflation even though they are supply-side driven, but there are complications in where things are today."<sup>22</sup>*

At its **Monetary Policy Committee** meeting on 2 December the BoB decided to maintain the bank rate at 3.75%.<sup>23</sup> Pelaelo noted that inflation rose from 8.4% in September to 8.8% in October, remaining above the upper bound of the bank's medium-term objective range of 3% - 6%. The increase in inflation mainly reflects the upward adjustment in domestic fuel prices in October but is projected to revert to within the objective range in Q3 2022, mainly on account of the dissipating impact of the upward adjustment, during 2021, of value added tax (VAT) and administered prices from the inflation calculation.<sup>24</sup>

Pelaelo noted that the BoB will continue to monitor all developments, and that the economic situation adds urgency to the need for structural reforms necessary to rebuild Botswana's fiscal buffers.<sup>25</sup> The governor added that reforms covering areas such as electricity, internet connectivity, water, education and digitisation are necessary to enhance capacity and efficiency in the economy to build resilience.<sup>26</sup> BoB research and financial stability director **Lesedi Senatla** said the central bank still has tools at its disposal to respond to economic shocks, including unconventional monetary policy such as bond or asset purchases:

*"We have interest rates to work with and we are not at zero percent yet... That will be determined by what we see on the ground, what the sources of the problem are and we will have to identify where the weaknesses are."*

Botswana's finance ministry projects a growth rate of 9.7% in 2021, moderating to 4.3% growth in 2022.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Mpho Balopi Facebook Account, 24 Dec 2021

<sup>19</sup> BusinessWeek, 2 Dec 2021

<sup>20</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

<sup>21</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

<sup>22</sup> BusinessWeek, 2 Dec 2021

<sup>23</sup> Bank of Botswana press release, 2 Dec 2021

<sup>24</sup> Bank of Botswana press release, 2 Dec 2021

<sup>25</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

<sup>26</sup> BusinessWeek, 2 Dec 2021

<sup>27</sup> Bank of Botswana press release, 2 Dec 2021

### ... but De Beers remains optimistic despite Omicron

**United Kingdom**-headquartered diamond mining corporation **De Beers** says it expects the measures it has put in place to cope with Covid-19 to shield it from the threat to trade posed by the new Omicron variant.<sup>28</sup> The imposition of travel bans on Botswana by the key diamond markets such as **India** and the **United States (US)** have caused concern in the industry, which has seen steady recovery from the pandemic-induced downturn of 2020.<sup>29</sup>

De Beers hosts 10 auctions in **Gaborone** each year, offering rough diamonds from its operations across the world for viewing and buying by its list of exclusive buyers known as sight holders. De Beers' vice president of diamond trading, **Paul Rowley**, said on 24 November that if it proved impossible for its buyers to travel to Botswana for its rough diamond actions, it would continue with an already tested alternative of offering viewings in other locations.<sup>30</sup> Rowley said it was too early to assess the impact of the Omicron variant on the group's business, as significant uncertainty remained with scientific analysis ongoing. However, he said that general sentiment in the diamond industry continued to be positive on the back of strong demand for diamond jewellery from the US:

*"This was reflected in the demand we saw for rough diamonds during Cycle 9 (the ninth auction)...Such demand was in line with expectations given the normal pattern of cutting factory closures in India during the **Diwali** festival."*<sup>31</sup>

De Beers Group earned roughly \$430m from the sale of rough diamonds during its ninth sales cycle of 2021.<sup>32</sup> On 22 December, De Beers announced provisional sales of \$332m in its 10th and last auction for the year, a drop of about 27% from the same period in 2020 and 24% down from the ninth auction.<sup>33</sup> Rowley said the group expected rough diamond sales to be impacted by the Christmas holiday closures of cutting factories in **Southern Africa** but expects to see positive industry conditions prevailing into 2022 in light of the healthy outlook for the key retail selling season.<sup>34</sup>

De Beers co-owns **Debswana Diamond Company** in a 50:50 joint venture with the government of Botswana, and earnings from local mines are key anchors of the national budget and foreign exchange. The government forecast in 2021 that mineral revenues would exceed P20.3 billion (\$1.74 billion) due to a rebound in rough diamond sales.<sup>35</sup>

### BURS on track to reach P40bn tax target

The **Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS)** has reportedly collected P38.5 billion (\$3.3 billion) in taxes in the 2020-2021 financial year, setting it on course to reach the P40 billion (\$3.4 billion) target set by government.<sup>36</sup> Tax collection levels are generally seen as indicative of the health of an economy, as well as revenue authorities' efforts in pursuing taxpayers' liabilities. BURS commissioner general **Jeannette Makgolo** noted that given the prevailing economic circumstances, BURS is *"actually not doing badly in terms of tax collections for the current financial year"*.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Mmegi, 17 Dec 2021

<sup>29</sup> Mmegi, 17 Dec 2021

<sup>30</sup> BusinessWeek, 24 Nov 2021

<sup>31</sup> Mining Weekly, 24 Nov 2021

<sup>32</sup> Mining Weekly, 24 Nov 2021

<sup>33</sup> Mmegi, 24 Dec 2021

<sup>34</sup> Mining Weekly, 24 Nov 2021

<sup>35</sup> Mmegi, 17 Dec 2021

<sup>36</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

<sup>37</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

Local analysts say the higher tax collections were helped by tighter collections, increase in Value Added Tax (VAT) and withholding tax, and BURS pursuing revenues from previously under-monitored sectors, such as the second-hand import vehicle sector.<sup>38</sup> BURS had initially set a target of P43 billion (\$3.6 billion) for the 2020-2021 financial year; however, it was revised due to the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy.<sup>39</sup>

Makgolo said BURS is forecasted to collect P41.97 billion (\$3.606 billion) across the various tax lines on the government's behalf in the 2022-2023 financial year.<sup>40</sup> The tax targets are informed by macroeconomic fiscal frameworks produced by the finance ministry, which applies various tools to forecast how much tax the agency is likely to collect.

## Planner

24 Feb 2022 **Gaborone (Botswana) Bank of Botswana Monetary Policy Committee** meets;

Mar 2022 **(Botswana)** Target date to establish 2,400 new businesses, including 32 manufacturing companies;

Apr 2022 **(Botswana)** Government to kick off measures to merge, chop or sell off some entities in its portfolio of 64 parastatals;

Sep 2022 **(Botswana)** Constitutional Review Commission to submit a report with recommendations to the president not later than end of September;

2022 **(Botswana) Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)** elective congress;

2022 **(Botswana)** National Census;

Mar 2023 **(Botswana)** End date of **National Development Plan 11 (NDP11)**;

2024 **(Botswana)** Presidential elections

## Chronology

10 Jan 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Sunday Standard.** Acting president **Slumber Tsogwane** leaves for the Extra Ordinary **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** Troika and Summit in **Lilongwe (Malawi)** with President **Mokgweetsi Masisi** in self-isolation after testing positive for Covid-19 on 3 January;

7 Jan 2022 **Gaborone (Botswana) Daily News.** The **African Leadership Magazine** selects President **Mokgweetsi Masisi** as its Africa Peace and Security Leader of the Year;

6 Jan 2022 **Gaborone (Botswana) Mmegi.** Diamond industry experts **Rapaport** call deal by local diamond cutting and polishing firm **Safdico** to buy and process diamonds from **Lucapa Diamond Company** in **Angola** one of the 2021 'game changers';

6 Jan 2022 **Gaborone (Botswana) Office of the President.** President **Mokgweetsi Masisi** remains in self isolation at his official residence and has not experienced any **Covid-19**-related symptoms;

5 Jan 2022 **Gaborone (Botswana) Daily News.** Government says opening of schools will follow a phased approach when learners and staff return for Term 1 on 11 January;

<sup>38</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

<sup>39</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

<sup>40</sup> Mmegi, 10 Dec 2021

3 Jan 2022 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Office of the President*. **Office of the President (OP)** announces that President **Mokgweetsi Masisi** is in self isolation at **State House** after testing positive for **Covid-19** and that vice president **Slumber Tsogwane** will act as president until further notice;

31 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. **Department of Road Transport and Safety (DRTS)** announces that local public transport fares will be adjusted as of 1 January;

30 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Sunday Standard*. High court rules that Section 24 of **Intelligence and Security Service (ISS) Act** does not afford the **Directorate on Intelligence and Security (DIS)** protection from litigation or empower it to seize, search or seal property without lawful measure;

29 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *The Monitor*. Ministry of health announces that booster doses for **Covid-19** will be administered in due course and that Covid-19 vaccinations will transit to Phase 4, covering those aged between 12 and 17;

24 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *The Monitor*. Ruling **Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)** secretary general **Mpho Balopi** hands in his resignation as minister of employment, labour productivity and skills development;

24 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. **Constitutional Review Commission** members are sworn into their roles;

24 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Sunday Standard*. **Gaborone High Court** judge **Godfrey Radijeng** grants former president **Ian Khama** access to his official residence, State House 4, after the **Directorate on Intelligence and Security (DIS)** removed his staff, took away the dogs and sealed the place, ruling that the sealing of Khama's house is illegal;

23 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Daily News*. Defence, justice and security minister **Kagiso Mmusi** pays a three-day visit to Botswana troops in **Mozambique** in the **Cabo Delgado** area to convey a message of gratitude to troops and to boost their morale;

21 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *The Monitor*. **Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)** says it will reflect on the factors that led to electoral losses at wards they had previously won in the 2019 General Election;

21 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. **Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC)** president **Duma Boko** says the UDC rejects the use of a commission of enquiry act to create a constitution and that those selected to lead the constitutional review process should have been objectively examined against peers and agreed by key stake holders;

21 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Daily News*. **Ramatlabama** border-post is closed until further notice due to **Covid-19** related protocols;

20 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. Members of **Botswana Sectors of Educators Trade Union (BOSETU)** accuse BOSETU secretary-general, **Tobokani Rari** of altering the union's constitution to his benefit;

20 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **Botswana Housing Corporation (BHC)**'s pre-tax profits for the half year to September 2021 increased by more than threefold from levels over the corresponding period in 2020, helped by rental adjustments and the resolution of a dispute with a major customer;

20 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. **Botswana Investment and Trade Centre (BITC)** says it has picked investment leads worth millions of pula at the ongoing **Dubai Expo**, including an expression of interest by the **Shaikh Hussain Finance House** to avail \$50m for funding business across all sectors;

- 19 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Sunday Standard*. The trio of the **Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC)**, **Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF)** and **Alliance for Progressives (AP)** outclassed the ruling **Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)** in local government by-elections, winning eight of the 11 council seats on offer;
- 19 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **Botswana Energy Regulatory Authority (BERA)** announces an increases in fuel prices;
- 18 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Sunday Standard*. **Alliance For Progressives (AP)** reportedly aims to interdict appointment of commissions of inquiry on constitutional review;
- 17 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. Justice **Maruping Dibotelo** to chair the Presidential Commission of inquiry on Review of the Constitution, which will submit a report with recommendations to the president no later than the end of September;
- 17 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Daily News*. Botswana receives 71,200 doses of the **Chinese**-manufactured **Sinovac** Covid-19 vaccine;
- 17 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered diamond giant **De Beers** says it expects the measures it put in place to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic, to protect it from the threat to trade caused by the Omicron variant;
- 17 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Sunday Standard*. Talks between the government of Botswana and the **United Kingdom**-headquartered diamond giant **De Beers** are expected to drag on for six more months;
- 15 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **Botswana Telecommunications Corporation Limited (BTCL)** expects its pre-tax profits for the half year ended 30 September to be as much as 32% higher than the previous corresponding period;
- 15 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Sunday Standard*. **Stanbic Bank Botswana** has appointed **Chose Modise** as its CEO, effective 1 January;
- 15 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **United Kingdom** removes Botswana, **Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia** and **Zimbabwe** from its travel red list;
- 14 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **Court of Appeal (CoA)** has refused to grant the **Directorate of Intelligence and Security (DIS)** an expedited appeal for former president **Ian Khama's** search warrant;
- 14 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Daily News*. **Botswana Hotel, Catering, Travel and Tourism Workers Union (BHCTTWU)** has called on President **Mokgweetsi Masisi** to take the lead in ending his feud with former president **Ian Khama**;
- 13 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **Botswana Mine Workers Union (BMWU)** has reportedly entered into strategic partnership with local and international organisations to transform itself;
- 13 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **Bank of Botswana (BoB)** (central bank) cautions that the economic threat posed by the new Omicron variant is eating into the room available to respond through fiscal and monetary policy;
- 10 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana)** *Mmegi*. The **Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS)** has reportedly collected P38.5 billion (\$3.3 billion) in taxes in the 2020-2021 financial year, setting the institution on course to reach the P40 billion (\$3.4 billion) target set by government;

- 10 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Mmegi**. The **Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI)** announces plans to build **Africa's** largest antigen bank;
- 9 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Office of the President**. President **Mokgweetsi Masisi** cancels Kgotla local community meetings over rising **Covid-19** cases;
- 8 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Mmegi**. The country's largest tourism group, **Wilderness Safaris**, says no cancellations have yet been recorded as a result of the Omicron variant, as clients adopt a wait and see attitude;
- 7 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Mmegi**. Government launches Middle Income Strategy aiming to create 100 young Batswana millionaires in 10 years and grow the middle class;
- 7 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Mmegi**. **Morupule Coal Mine (MCM)** is setting up a marketing office in **South Africa** to increase its exports to that market, with production from the new P1.7 billion (\$146m) open cast mine already committed to industrial customers in that country;
- 6 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Mmegi**. Aspirant presidential candidate for the **Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF)**, **Samson Moyo Guma** warns that the feud between incumbent president **Mokgweetsi Masisi** and former president **Ian Khama** should not involve Batswana;
- 6 Dec 2021 **Gaborone (Botswana) Mmegi**. Former president **Ian Khama** says he has been fully aware that the **Directorate on Intelligence and Security (DIS)** seeks to create an impression that he was a national security threat and that he has committed treason.

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