

**Botswana Federation Of Secondary
School Teachers. BOFESETE.**

National Congress

Date Saturday, 19 August 2000

Venue U.B. Auditorium 240/011

National Executive Chairpersons Report.

The State of the Federation
Theme Developing Manpower potential
Towards Vision 2016.

Mr Baboloki Tlale

Introduction.

This report covers the activities of the Federation for the past two years till today. It highlights the successes that have been achieved and it also raises the challenges that confront the Federation and how they are to be tackled. An attempt is made to chart a vision for the hereafter . This congress should also serve as a forum for members to make the leadership aware of their expectations. I sometimes get the impression that I am not certain of what our members expect us to do for them. We should get a clear mandate and direction from members as to what they expect us to. We need to be in tune with the interests and needs of our members.

Ever since the organisation was registered with the Registrar of Societies in 1987 there has been very little in terms of growth, but since the inception of the check off system in 1999, the organisation has experienced unmitigated growth in terms of both registered membership and our institutional capacity to function. 1999 was a watershed year in the history of teacher unionism Botswana in that another force arrived on the scene formally. For a number of years our growth had been stifled by the lack of a steady source of income from our members in the form of a subscription.

Secretariat. The Secretariat has moved from the offices of Libra Agency to our own offices in extension 12 in plot no 3391. The offices are rented to the tune of P3500.00 per month. While the price may sound like a lot, it was absolutely imperative that the organisation should find office space so as to give us the freedom to operate without restrictions. Currently we are engaged in efforts to acquire additional furniture and office equipment. We need to acquire additional computer hardware and software for the secretariat to more efficient and effective. For us to have a proper secretariat we have had to engage an additional employee. The secretariat is manned by Mrs Mogotsi and Ms Mahudiri Badiri

Registered and subscribed membership stands at 1800 (according to the latest information) our target is 2500 by the end of the year. So there is still a lot of work to be done to meet the target set. Let us all do what ever we can to recruit more members into the Federation. If each one of us gathered here could register 5 members each, that would help a great deal. We are even seriously and actively considering to pay members who sign up others about P10.00 per form that you submit, so if you bring 10 completed forms you get an easy P100.00 . We just thinking about this idea.

Due to the many administrative costs and overheads we have had to review our subscription rate and increase it to P10.00. While this was a hundred percent increase, this was barely enough to keep us working. Someone wrote in the papers about the fact that we do not have a full time employees at an executive level who could attend to day to day affairs of the Federation. It is indeed true that the lack of a chief executive is a source of weakness for the organisation. There is an urgent need to engage a chief executive to run the secretariat on a day to day basis. The cost of maintaining such an officer would have to be considered carefully by this august congress. The Executive is considering engaging someone on voluntary basis to help to run the affairs of the Fedration. We are exploring the possibility of doing that through an NGO.

The growth of the organisation makes it imperative that we should review our structures and the way we operate and even the constitution. I have already made mention to the need to create the post of executive secretary. One of our most serious weaknesses has been our representation at the local level. We have been operating mainly at the executive level have been very thing at the local level. This Congress would to seriously address itself to the challenge of regional structures. We need functional structures at grass root level. Our structures must take cognisance the country's geographical situation. We need to review a lot of sections of our constitution to make it compliant to the changes that the organisation has to face. A constitutional review is one task of the Congress.

Legal Firm of the Federation. I am pleased to inform you that the Federation has signed up with the legal firm of Moupou, Motswagole and Dingake. The law firm seems to have special interest in labour matters and we were able to cut a good deal with the company. Our members on production of the membership cards are exempted from paying opening of file fees. On legal matters lets make it clear that the national Executive is the one that has signed up with the law firm on behalf of members. It is the executive that should instruct the attorneys to act on behalf on members. Remember that each one of us has many different matters, some of which are totally unrelated to our work as teachers. The federation should only help in matters of a professional nature or where there is an important principle that the Federation feels it should defend.

The Executive has committed itself to making savings with the law firm to have a fund to use in the eventuality of court cases and legal consultation. This is in recognition of the fact that there are a lot of issues that should be taken up with lawyers. But as long as our subscription rate is low we are always going to be vulnerable to fear of the law. Currently we are inundated by a lot cases and issues that our members bring before for redress. There are numerous cases regarding parallel progression, teachers complaining that they are not progressing at the rate that they should have progressed. Some complaints are that of unfair treatment by school heads. These cases need to be solved and resolved. The issues being referred to us call on our institutional capacity to deliver what the teachers expect us to deliver. Teachers look for solutions from us. We need to have structures that can address these issues. We have already thought of an appeals body that will have not only executive representation but also some members of the public. There is need to assess the financial capacity to handle the grievances from our members. As a body we exist for the interests of our members. Some of these grievances put us on a difficult position as they are against school heads who are our members and therefore also deserving our support in their work.

The issues are further compounded by the position of the Ministry of Education. Currently BOFESETE does not have a proper forum for negotiating with Government. We depend on adhoc meetings with the Departments of Secondary and Teaching Service Management. We have in the past raised the matter with the past Minister of Education and also the permanent secretary and there was an understanding from his office that we could take up issues with the school heads on certain matters. Unfortunately we do not

have a recognition agreement with the Ministry that would spell out our rights and obligations with regard to representing our members. This allows a regional Educating officer to assert that BOFESETE has no right to be involved with school level matters but can only deal with the Ministry at policy level.

As the executive we ask for your input on this matter because it has far reaching consequences of finance and resources. We need to develop policies that can guide us when we should intervene on behalf of our members.

Rental increases. We have sought audience with Director of Secondary Education and also the Permanent Secretary of Education and the former Minister of Education. These attempts to mediate on behalf of teachers did not bear any fruit. Instead we were threatened with further rental increases. We have not given up the issue of challenging the unjust and uncalled for rental increase.

The government Policies of Parallel Progression and Scarce Skills continue to be a source of concern and frustration for teachers. Bofesete has made representation with regard to scarce skills and parallel progression but to no avail.

Let me make the position of Bofesete clear with regard to Scarce Skills, The government has introduced the policy on scarce skills in the public service, Bofesete wants the policy improved so that it recognises teaching as an indivisible profession that aims to produce a well balanced person. All subjects are important in the success of the student in the exams. We therefore want scarce skills to recognise teaching as a whole to be a scarce skill. Period. Secondary schools aim to produce a well rounded student. All the skills and attitudes taught at schools are important in life otherwise such subjects should be dropped. In any case students need a certain number of subjects to pass their courses. Teacher's responsibilities in a school are diverse and varied and can not be compartmentalised in the manner in which scarce skills policy does. There are other inconsistencies like not recognising the diplomas in science (other govt dept recognise diplomas) and not recognising school heads in senior schools while those in junior schools are rewarded. This is an ill conceived policy and my intention is not to critic the policy since you are well aware of the problems of the policy. My main task is to ask you 'what shall we do?'

One hopes that the new Minister will look at these issues with a fresh mind and apply himself to the problems.

The implementation of Parallel Progression is an unmitigated disaster right from the onset till today. The process, as they like to call it is fraught with inconsistencies and irregularities. Teachers are not progressing at the rate at which they should be progressing, not because of their lack of performance but, because of bureaucratic hurdles and log jams . There are people who should be at the level of Head of Department but are languishing at much lower levels. The Minister of Education should institute a committee of inquiry into the implementation of Parallel Progression. We call on the Vice President in his new role, to look into the lack of performance and delivery in our Ministry. If

Parallel Progression were to be used as a yard stick of Performance of TSM then I would call on the director of TSM to voluntarily relinquish his post because frankly there has been no delivery with regard to parallel progression. We pray that Performance Management System would reveal and expose non-performance in the MOE which is destroying the morale of teachers.

Currently the BTU is taking the Government to court over the matter. Bofesete supports the BTU in this noble effort. We applaud the BTU in taking on the might of the Govt. We are aware that justice is sometimes akin to gambling, and it can be very expensive for the litigants. Some of the issues to be tabled before the courts relate to bureaucratic ineptitude that I have alluded to earlier. That the govt loses many cases against teachers is also a clear sign that somewhere someone is not doing their jobs.

AIDS The Federation is concerned by the aids scourge that continues to claim the lives of Batswana and we would like to do our fair share to address the issue. We call on stake holders and policy makers to involve us in initiatives to combat the challenge. We call on all teachers as moral role models to be at the fore front of combating the problem in what they say and do. Teachers must practise safe sex at all times. Teachers should never be seen wanting in matters of a moral nature. Teenage pregnancy in which the teacher is implicated must receive the most severe legal sensure. They should as usual place the interests of their clients above all else.

The Federation has a funeral policy that pays when someone has died. This is not a particularly good response to the problem since it deals with the consequences of AIDS. We need to develop proactive policies that deal with the problem. Government policy on transfers must recognise that separating spouses can contribute to the problem. The Funeral Policy has been working satisfactorily, as far as I am aware there are no legitimate claims that have been turned down. Please be aware that there is no waiting period as was originally stated. In further discussions with the Management of Metropolitan it has since transpired that as a group funeral cover the scheme is supposed to be for all members. What this means is that the scheme should cover all members of a particular group or trade. The interpretation of this is that all members of Bofesete must subscribe to the scheme and there should be no opting out. I know that this does not go down well with most people , myself included. People argue that they have other schemes that they subscribe to and see no need to subscribe to another scheme. I however, want to encourage those who have not yet joined the scheme to do so because funerals are too expensive and if you have more than one scheme so much the better. The scheme is good in that it covers four parents and parents are the expensive part because they are seen as a high risk group.

Unity with other teacher organisations. It would appear that there is going to be progress on this issue because the BTU, which has been against unity, (at least the leadership) has now had a change of heart. There is hope that towards the end of the year some form of deal should be in place. A draft constitution is in place.

Information Technology. Recently there were reports from parliament to the effect that websites can not transport food to the rural areas. While I respect the opinions of the honourable members of the legislature within the context of the issue they were discussing I want to say that in the interest of staff development and the improvement of education in the country, all schools in Botswana must have free access to the internet. Teachers must have unrestricted access to the Internet. Access to the net must not be limited to the computers in the heads offices. Schools must develop their own websites. Students should compete in designing websites in addition to the current science projects that they do. The world is increasingly being divided between the information rich and the information poor. If schools do not teach computers then they risk being irrelevant since they would not be preparing children for the future but for the past. To this end we call upon the government to expedite the equipping of all schools with computers. Websites and email should be a common place of communication in the schools and the country in general. If there is money to subsidise the purchase of luxury vehicles for MPs, Chiefs and others then there should be something left to buy computer hardware and software for the schools. We applaud the WorLD Link project that will be piloted in some schools.

Privatisation. There is current talk about privatisation . Trade unions must position themselves to participate actively in this exercise. Bofesete should gear itself to participate in the privatisation movements. We should use our collective strength to be important role players in the exercise, otherwise the wealth of the country will be taken by foreigners.

Teachers Day. Bofesete is concerned by the poor participation of secondary school Teachers in Teachers Day activities. We are also aware that not many secondary school teachers get nominated for awards. This must not be allowed to continue. Last year there was not a single award recipient from the senior schools, this is unacceptable and we call on all the involved people to rectify the situation. We call on secondary school teachers to take in the leadership role in Teachers Day activities so that they can give the necessary direction and impetus to the day. It is only when they are involved that they can best represent their interests.

Cost Recovery in Education. While Bofesete is aware of the need for balanced budgets and the need for prudent financial management, we strongly believe that no child should be denied the fundamental right to education as a result of the recently mooted cost sharing exercise. Education is a human right which should never be denied anyone. Education has probably been the single most important agent of social change and mobility in Botswana. This gain should not be thrown away. The govt must take cognisance of the fact that there is still a lot of extreme poverty in the country. Education is still the one important weapon in the fight against all the social, economic, medical ills that afflict the country. But perhaps cost sharing would make parents take a keener interest in the education of their children because often their interest is found wanting.

Elections

Importantly this Congress must vote a leadership for the Federation to take it into the millennium. On elections my only appeal is to encourage our ladies to avail themselves for any positions in the executive.

Conclusion. This conference is an important development of the teacher movement in Botswana and we should seize the opportunity to strike a blow for teachers rights in Botswana. The honourable Minister of Education is scheduled to address this august conference later in the day. One can only hope that the Minister will announce some far reaching innovations to address some the issues that we have raised with the Minister and the other Ministry officials. The Ministry of education should recognise that once moral of teachers goes down it would take a long time and a lot of effort to raise it. Let us use the opportunity of this congress to develop the federation so that it can better serve the interests of its clients.