

Botswana

Collaboration Breeds Trust



Before Botswana became a full member of the IAEA in 2002, there was a general misconception about the functions of the Agency. “We thought the IAEA was just for the Western countries — for Europe,” says Mr. Stephen Williams, Head of the Policy and Legislation Division in Botswana’s Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology. “We thought they weren’t interested in us.”

Thanks to close collaboration between government officials, local scientists and IAEA experts, Botswana is making steady progress in meeting its Member State obligations and beginning to realize direct benefits from the application of radiation-based technologies. To date, Botswana’s most significant gain from joining the IAEA is best illustrated by a project to integrate the sterile insect technique (SIT) into a national programme to create a tsetse-free zone in Ngamiland (the northwestern district), and thereby eliminate Trypanosomosis, an infectious disease that can be fatal to livestock herds and harmful to humans.

But Botswana also recognized its need for assistance in creating a regulatory infrastructure to deal with more than 400 radioactive sources used in different industrial sectors.

“Such sources are commonly utilized in Botswana’s mineral industry, as nuclear gauges for various applications, and more so within the diamond mines,” says Mr. Williams. “Thus, the government was keen to make provisions for monitoring workers in mineral, construction and processing industries, as well as those in medical fields who might diagnose and treat exposure-related conditions.”

Initially, monitoring activities had to be carried out at facilities in neighboring States; this dependency on external service providers created administrative complications. Today, Botswana is en route to greater self-sufficiency. With the help of IAEA experts, Mr. Williams is overseeing the establishment of local monitoring facilities.

Thanks to the environment of understanding and trust that now exists between Botswana and the IAEA, this effort has strong local backing as well, says Mr. Williams, “The government has authorized the provision of appropriate staff, office space, transport and monitoring equipment in record time towards this effort, thereby proving its commitment to building the necessary regulatory infrastructure.”

—Linda Lodding/Managing Editor