Did you know that about fifty thousand Batswana can now feed themselves thanks to the Government-sponsored Food Coupon Project?

That’s a vast number of people who would – if not for the intervention of the Food Coupons – be living in conditions of starvation.

The Batswana who come from privileged, middle class backgrounds have no idea how many people are currently benefitting from this initiative.

And that’s a good thing. You see, the system protects the anonymity of its beneficiaries – many of whom are home-based care patients, orphans and destitutes.

All they need is a simple smart card – it looks just like an ATM card – which they can swipe to buy food at over 1 000 merchant locations in 232 villages all over Botswana. They can now wander the aisles, take their time and choose their favourite brands just like any normal customer paying with cash.

‘The system is at work even in Botswana’s most remote villages. Gone are the days when men, women and children would have to queue for hours to collect a pile of rations to last the whole month. No more waiting. No more social stigma. And no more rotten food,’ says SmartSwitch Botswana CEO, Kevin Duke.

A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The old system also forced food merchants to enter into laborious and corruption-riddled tender processes. That’s all ancient history now.

‘With tenders out the window, we’ve managed to eliminate the fraud, bribery and dishonest practices that were part and parcel of the old food basket system,’ says Duke proudly.

The result is a more efficient allocation of government resources.

‘We’re now feeding more people with less money because we’ve closed all the loopholes,’ says Duke.

Ms MODIAGANE
Nikomi General Dealer, Gabane

‘I prefer the SmartSwitch way over the old food basket tender system because under the old arrangement you could not win the tender for reasons you would never know about. The SmartSwitch method has levelled the playing field for us as business people. The coupon system has gone a long way in reducing the stereotype of an African businessperson being seen as a tender-preneur.’

Ms ABDULLAH
Abdulla’s General Dealer, Gabane

‘Under the food basket system it took me three months to receive payments for food parcels sold. Compare that with the 48 hours under the current system. Much better. SmartSwitch has also helped me to become a very competitive entrepreneur. I have to actively negotiate for better prices and quality of goods from my suppliers which I can pass over to all my customers, food coupon and cash customers alike.’

Ms OTISITSWE
Boikhutso General Dealer, Mogoditshane

‘The coupon system has given me an additional customer base resulting in positive growth for my business. Although there are many SmartSwitch POS devices in this area, I still realise meaningful income from the coupon system.’

Ms MODUBLE
Modusa General Dealer, Gabane

‘The service gets better every year. If our swiping devices need repairing, they are always quick to respond so that we minimize the loss of sales – and inconvenience to customers. We get excellent service from SmartSwitch, who has now become a valuable partner in growing our business.’

‘Not any kind of merchant can sign up and start selling goods to Food Coupon beneficiaries,’ says Duke.

‘We have to protect the integrity of this social support mechanism. We want to help create wealth for small-scale, local merchants. Our focus is on general dealers who operate in rural or peri-urban areas. This is a serious priority for the Government.’

Duke explains, ‘We do this so that local businesses can compete and grow. By exposing them to a customer base of fifty thousand Food Coupon beneficiaries countrywide, it's an excellent opportunity for small stores to sharpen their skills and compete.’

About P25 million a month flows into the grassroots economy as a direct result of the Food Coupon Project. And the trilateral partners who spearhead and manage the system are determined that the benefits should go to Batswana who need them the most.

Technology pioneered by SmartSwitch Botswana means that she can buy food just like any normal shopper. It gives Food Coupon shoppers more dignity and anonymity. She can also:

- Shop at different stores to take advantage of special offers
- Choose her family’s favourite brands
- Shop daily, weekly or monthly. It’s her choice
- Enjoy fresh meat, fruit, veg and dairy products
- Protect the value stored on her card from theft, because of the fingerprint recognition technology the system uses.

IS SHE ON THE FOOD COUPON PROJECT? (YOU’LL NEVER KNOW)

A partnership between Ministry of Local Government, the Department of Social Services and SmartSwitch Botswana makes the Food Coupon System a powerful tool for local empowerment.

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