

Enclave tourism and its socio-economic impacts in the Okavango Delta, Botswana

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Abstract

This paper draws on the dependency paradigm to explain the development of enclave tourism and its socio-economic impacts in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. Using both primary and secondary data source, the study indicates that international tourists, foreign safari companies and investors dominate the tourism industry in the Okavango Delta. The foreign domination and ownership of tourism facilities has led to the repatriation of tourism revenue, domination of management positions by expatriates, lower salaries for citizen workers, and a general failure by tourism to significantly contribute to rural poverty alleviation in the Okavango region. Tourism as a result has a minimal economic impact on rural development mainly because it has weak linkages with the domestic economy, particularly agriculture. Because of its nature, tourism in the Okavango Delta cannot be described as being sustainable from a socio-economic perspective. In order to address problems of enclave tourism development and promote more inclusive and beneficial tourism development in the Okavango, there is need to adopt policies and strategies that will ensure that substantial amounts of tourism revenue are retained in the Okavango and Botswana. These strategies should also ensure that tourism development in the Okavango Delta has strong linkages with the rest of the economy in Botswana.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is arguably the world's largest and fastest growing industry, accounting for 5.5% of the global Gross National Product and 6% of the employment (Glasson, Godfrey, & Goodey, 1999). Tourism is usually promoted by a country for its ability to spread economic development and reduce inequalities in income distribution by providing employment to people in a particular geographical area (Pearce, 1988; Coccossis & Parpairis, 1995; Wahab & Pigram, 1997). Governments, particularly in the Third World encourage tourism investment because of the assumption that it will contribute to economic development of their countries (Hall, 1995). In poor countries, regions, towns and cities, tourism is seen as a fast track to development (Glasson et al., 1999). Governments therefore, view tourism as a catalyst for

national and regional development, bringing employment, exchange earnings, balance of payments advantages and important infrastructure developments benefiting locals and visitors alike (Glasson et al., 1999).

In the Southern African state of Botswana, tourism was almost non-existent at the country's independence in 1966 (Mbaiwa, 2002). By 2000, it had grown to be the second largest economic sector in the country contributing 4.5% to Botswana Gross Domestic product (Botswana Tourism Development Programme, BTDP, 1999; Department of Tourism, DoT, 2000). Much of Botswana's holiday tourists visit the Okavango Delta (an inland wetland) and rich wildlife habitat located in northwestern Botswana (Fig. 1). The Okavango Delta became a wetland of international importance and a Ramsar site in 1997. It is home to 5000 types of insect, 3000 plant, 540 bird, 164 mammal, 157 reptile and 80 fish species as well as countless micro-organisms (Rothert, 1997). It is also home to over 122,000 people who live within and around the region (Central Statistics Office, CSO, 2002). The wide variety of wildlife species and a relatively pristine wilderness habitat attracts

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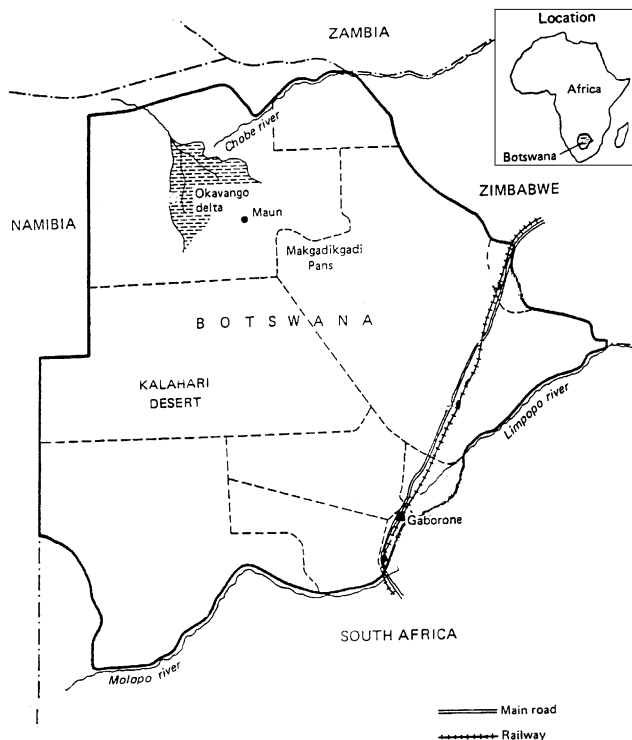


Fig. 1. Map of the Okavango Delta, Botswana.

tourists from around the world, making the Okavango Delta one of the most important tourist destinations in Botswana (NWDC, 2003).

In the past 5 years, more than a quarter of a million tourists came to the Okavango Delta, almost double the number of the previous 5 years (Mbaiwa, Bernard, & Orford, 2002). On average, about 50,000 tourists visit the Okavango Delta annually (Mbaiwa, 2002). The growth of tourism has stimulated the development of a variety of allied infrastructure and facilities, such as hotels, lodges and camps, airport and airstrips, within and around the Okavango Delta. These tourism services have led to a booming tourist economy built around what is perceived internationally as a “new” and “exotic” destination (Mbaiwa et al., 2002). Ahn, Lee, and Shafer (2002) state that tourism facilities and programmes are developed to create changes such as increased personal income or tax revenues to a host region. However, tourism as with any type of development can also create changes that remove opportunity or threatens the quality of life. Previous studies in Botswana (e.g. Fowkes, 1985; BTDP, 1999) focused on positive economic impacts of tourism such as foreign exchange earnings, employment creation and infrastructure development without necessarily touching on issues of negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts or whether there is an equitable sharing and distribution of tourism benefits by stakeholders. The growth of tourism in the Okavango Delta therefore raises questions of

sustainability. Wall (1997) notes that sustainable development provides for tourism to be economically viable, ecologically sensitive and culturally appropriate.

The dependency paradigm is one of the frameworks that has been used to describe tourism in developing countries (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). The paradigm notes that tourism in developing countries largely relies on demand from, and is organised from developed countries. This arrangement creates a type of tourism known as enclave tourism (Britton, 1982; Oppermann & Chon, 1997). The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to use the dependency paradigm in explaining the development of tourism in the Okavango Delta which is otherwise described as enclave tourism (Mbaiwa, 2002, 2003c). The paper also uses the concept of sustainable development to assess the sustainability of tourism in the wetland. In terms of structure, this paper is organised as follows: the first section deals with background and conceptual issues used in the paper, namely, sustainable development, the dependency paradigm and enclave tourism. The second section deals with the methodology used in the survey leading to the production of this paper. The third section and main body of the paper examines the demand pattern of tourism and countries where most tourists that visit the Okavango Delta originate. It also discusses the socio-economic impacts of enclave tourism, examines the rural poverty situation in the Okavango Delta and assesses the tourism policy on how it promotes the development enclave tourism in the wetland. The fourth and last section concludes the paper. It gives suggestions on strategies that can promote sustainable tourism in the Okavango Delta.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Sustainable tourism development

The concept of sustainable development became a catchphrase in tourism research and in the international development community after the release of the *World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) Report* in 1987. The term continues to be influential as much of tourism is on cultural, economic and environmental impacts (Ahn et al., 2002). According to Angelsen, Fjeldstad, and Rashid-Sumaila (1994) and Munasinghe and McNeely (1995), the concept of sustainable development is hinged on three broad approaches and concerns, namely: social, economic, and ecological sustainability.

Economic efficiency aims at producing the maximum output in order to achieve a high standard of living of the people within the constraints of the existing capital (Markandya, 1993; Paehlke, 1999). Although economic sustainability implies meeting the economic needs of

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