



I.

WETLANDS CONFERENCE TO MARK THE COMPLETION OF THE OKAVANGO DELTA MANAGEMENT PLAN 31ST JANUARY 2008 – 1ST FEBRUARY 2008

THEME: Sharing lessons & experiences for better implementation of wetland management plans

Background

The Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism (MEWT) through the Department of Environmental Affairs has been involved in a process to develop the management plan for the Okavango Delta since May 2003. The development of the plan has just been concluded (October 2006). In order to kick-start the implementation phase MEWT organised an international wetlands management conference to mark the completion of the ODMP and present it to all stakeholders.

The Okavango Delta in a regional context

Three countries share the Okavango River Basin. It begins in the highlands of Angola, and flows 1,200 kilometres downstream through the narrow Caprivi Strip of Namibia and empties in Botswana where it forms an alluvial fan known as the Okavango Delta. A unique feature which is habitat to several biological resources characterized by extraordinary and complex hydrological and ecological processes and is home to 124,000 inhabitants.

Rationale for the international wetlands conference held in Maun, Botswana

The Okavango Delta is an important wetland system in Botswana and internationally. The development of its management plan demonstrates the commitment to sustainably manage its resources and improve the socio-economic wellbeing of its people. The wetlands conference created an opportunity to share ideas, experiences and lessons from the ODMP planning process and from other areas of wetlands management. In addition as Botswana Government gears itself to implement the ODMP it has benefited from the experiences from the regional and international community on how it can better implement the plan.

The Okavango Delta is located at the tail-end of the Okavango river system hence Botswana is cautious of the upstream water use needs and the potential impacts on downstream uses as well as the interest to protect the socio-economic status of the delta communities and the economy of Botswana at large. In order to adequately deal with these issues integrated, coordinated and collaborative efforts in planning are vital to achieve sustainability in wetland management.

The conference provided a platform for wetlands experts in Botswana and regionally to, among other things;

- a. Deliberate on the critical institutional and socio-political as well as environmental elements which the district and national partners should focus attention on in order for the implementation of the ODMP to make an impact;
- b. Commit to responsible and accountable action which creates an environment for effective implementation;
- c. Define common ground in wetlands management approach and recognise differences in resource management interests and opportunities and define strategies for further action within set frameworks;
- d. Share their experiences, lessons and insights on wetlands management which can complement those of the ODMP.

Highlights on some the outcomes of the conference:

1. Insights on how successful implementation of the ODMP can be achieved
2. Shared lessons and experiences for improved management of shared river basins
3. Areas for future collaboration among projects in the region
4. Concrete ideas on the practical ways of implementing the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) plans.
5. How ODMP could feed into the OKACOM process
6. Networking and opportunities for future collaboration amongst wetland managers and experts

II.

**ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE: OKAVANGO DELTA
WETLAND MANAGEMENT
31ST JANUARY 2008,**

Theme: Whose Delta Is It?

The theme *Whose Delta Is It?* Is a broad topic however the question could be unpacked to focus on two important aspects. Firstly ownership of a resource entails full accountability and responsibility to manage; and secondly the realization and equal beneficitation from the benefits accrued from the resource. The sustainable management of the Delta is premised on the attainment of the two elements outlined above. As we strive to achieve sustainability does the broad range of stakeholders feel that the opportunities are there for them to manage and enjoy the benefits derived from the Delta resources? Is the necessary framework available for all those concerned to contribute towards the management of the Delta?

Objective: To instill a sense of collective ownership which encompass the rights and responsibilities to manage and sustainably utilize the resources of the Okavango Delta by all stakeholders (from local, regional to international level).

Topic: Community Perspectives

Topic Guidelines:

- Is legislative and policy framework conducive to facilitate resource management by local communities?
 - ✓ Devolution of decision-making to local communities and facilitation for local-level participation in management
 - ✓ Communal ownership and open access which to a certain extent result in increasing land use pressure. This requires new approach (including revision of old and obsolete laws and promulgation of new legislations and policies) relating to resources, and better clarity on property rights.
 - ✓ Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) – A benefit of CBNRM being the right to manage, and the resultant benefits that come from managing
 - ✓ Availability of overarching legislation instead of fragmented and incoherent pieces of legislation (cross referencing to other Acts)
- Do the local communities have the requisite capacity to manage?
 - ✓ Skills development among local communities
 - ✓ Better resources (equipment and finance)
 - ✓ Knowledge management (use of conventional and traditional knowledge)

Theme: Economic Opportunities – Tourism

Topic Guidelines:

- Are economic opportunities available in tourism compatible with conservation and allow long-term sustainable management of the Delta?
- Are the tourism operators aware that they have a responsibility to manage the Delta and plough back to the conservation of the resources of the Delta? Does, and if so how, tourism pay for conservation?
- Are all people equally able to participate in tourism? (legislation, funding mechanisms, skills development, capacity building, possibilities for new entrants, etc)
- What is the economic impact of tourism from the local to national level?
- Willingness-to-pay by tourists
- How can we achieve diversification of tourism products in the Okavango Delta?

Theme: Ecological Dimensions

Topic Guidelines:

- Do managers have the necessary consideration for the requirements of the environment (ecological reserve)?
- How to take into account the needs of the environments (Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC, adaptive management) while balancing the need to meet developmental pressures
- Do the managers (local communities, state actors, private sector) have the capacity to incorporate ecological/biodiversity requirements in their decision making?
- Managing water flows that may be influenced by broader social and political contexts

- Making research available to policy- and decision-makers, and whether policy- and decision-makers avail themselves of research findings – narrowing the gap
- Is there enough knowledge for proper decision making, if not how do we facilitate for further research and monitoring in the Delta? (funding for research and monitoring)

Theme: *Regional and International Interests*

Topic Guidelines:

- The Okavango Delta as a Ramsar Site –the implications and the obligations for Botswana
- Trans-boundary issues of rights and responsibilities
- Ownership and contributions to its conservation by regional and international parties
- Benefit sharing in a regional and international perspectives (payment for ecosystem services, compensation for opportunity cost, etc)

Reflections from the dialogue

The panel discussion was very successful and it provided a platform for members of the public to engage with private sector, policy makers and institutions that have a mandate to manage the resources of the Okavango Delta on pertinent issues that are deemed to be impediment to mutual and meaningful beneficiation and participation in the management of the Delta.

The question whose Delta is it? Was summed up by a Community Representative in his closing remarks describing the owners of the Delta as those who will remain with the Delta in its goodness and when it dies.

EXCURSIONS

On the first of February a number of excursions to the Okavango Delta were arranged with the support of various private sector companies. These included Okavango Wilderness Safaris, Elephant Back Safaris, Orient Express safaris, Desert and Delta Safaris, Moremi Air, Sefofane Air Charters and Air Botswana. The excursions provided an opportunity for participants to experience the ecosystem that a plan has been prepared for.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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