

Prospects of Basket Production in Promoting Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in the Okavango Delta, Botswana

Joseph E. Mbaiwa*

University of Botswana, Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre, Private Bag 285, Maun, Botswana

ABSTRACT

This paper uses the concept of sustainable rural livelihoods and income diversification to assess the role that basket making as a cultural tourism activity can play in improving rural livelihoods in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. Using both primary and secondary data sources, this paper points out that shocks and natural causes such as drought, disease and changing flood levels in the Okavango River, particularly the drying of the Thaoge (one of the tributaries of the Okavango), have contributed to a decline in livestock and crop yields and increased poverty levels in the region. Therefore, alternative livelihood options that can diversify rural incomes from agricultural production need to be identified. This paper argues that basket making has the potential to diversify rural incomes and improve livelihoods in the Okavango. Baskets are a cultural tourism product that can raise income earning and employment opportunities for rural residents in the Okavango. For this to be successful, basket making will need to be developed as part of cultural tourism. A sustainable cultural tourism sector where baskets are key products requires the sustainable use of natural resources used for basket making. These resources are at present overharvested and are threatened

with depletion. There is also a need to promote the empowerment of basket weavers particularly in entrepreneurship and managerial skills in the tourism business, attract young and educated people and promote the preservation of traditional basket making skills, which are important in the development of cultural tourism.

Keywords: Okavango Delta; basket making; sustainable rural livelihoods; income diversification; poverty alleviation; cultural tourism; cultural tourism product.

INTRODUCTION

Although Africa has experienced rapid urban growth in the last three decades following the years of independence from European colonial rule, the majority of the people still live in rural areas. It is estimated that over 75% of the people in sub-Saharan Africa reside in rural areas, where their livelihoods are characterised by insecurity in food production and poverty (Bhagavan, 1999; D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003). As a result, many rural households in sub-Saharan Africa battle to secure a reasonable livelihood (D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003). In the Okavango region in northwestern Botswana, economic activities and livelihood strategies for the rural people include agricultural (crop and livestock) production, fishing, hunting, and gathering of veld

*Correspondence to: J. E. Mbaiwa, University of Botswana, Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre, Private Bag 285, Maun, Botswana.
E-mail: jmbaiwa@orc.ub.bw

products are carried out to supplement crop and livestock farming (Bendsen and Meyer, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2003a). In addition, there are small-scale commercial activities such as the production and sale of crafts and local food and beverages, wage labour in the tourism industry, and formal employment in government and in the private sector (Bendsen and Meyer, 2002).

Natural factors such as the declining flood levels in the Okavango River, droughts and disease have had impacts on the traditional land-use system, particularly on agricultural production. This has as a result affected rural livelihoods as poverty levels increased. In order to reduce poverty levels and improve livelihoods and the living standards of rural people in the Okavango, alternative livelihood options need to be identified. The production of traditional artefacts such as baskets can be one of the options that need consideration. Traditionally women in the Okavango made baskets for households and agricultural uses (Terry, 1999; Mbaiwa, 2003a). Baskets became commercialised in the 1960s and 1970s when they became produced for the tourism market (Terry, 1999; Mbaiwa, 2003a). Although there has been a rapid growth of tourism in the Okavango Delta in the past 10–15 years, basket making has not been given due attention. As a result, the potential of basket making in diversifying the tourism industry from being largely wildlife and scenic based to promote cultural products is not adequately researched. Much is also not known on the potential of basket making in diversifying rural incomes and livelihoods.

Baskets are a cultural tourism product. Cultural products and attractions play an important role in tourism at all levels, from the global highlights of the world culture to attractions that underpin local identities (Richards, 2001). Littrel (1997) notes that culture can be viewed as comprising what people think (attitudes, beliefs, ideas and values), what people do (normative behaviour patterns, or way of life) and what people make (artworks, artefacts, cultural products). Culture is therefore composed of processes (the ideas and way of life of people) and the products of those processes (buildings, artefacts, art, customs, atmosphere) (Richards, 2001). Berwick (2003) notes that

culture is an artefact of human social practice which has visual outcomes that reflect the messages of particular organisations and send them to individual participants. Basket making in the Okavango Delta is a cultural product that shows the way of life of local communities thus can be used for the development of cultural tourism in the area.

Cultural tourism is a form of tourism built around cultural resources (Swarbrooke, 1999; McGettigan and Burns, 2001). Cultural tourism involves the consumption of cultural resources (Richards, 1993; McGettigan and Burns, 2001). As a result, cultural tourism is not only just about visiting sites and monuments (a view traditionally held about cultural tourism), but it also involves consuming the way of life of areas visited (Richards, 2001). Cultural tourism covers not just the consumption of cultural products of the past, but also of contemporary culture or way of life of a people or region (Richards, 2001). Richards notes that cultural tourism can be seen as covering both heritage tourism (related to artefacts of the past) and arts tourism (related to contemporary cultural production).

Based on the above understanding of cultural products and cultural tourism, the objective of this paper, therefore, is to use the concepts of sustainable rural livelihoods and income diversification to assess the role that basket making as a cultural tourism activity can play in improving rural livelihoods and income diversification in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. In doing so, the following questions are asked: (i) What are the factors or shocks that contribute to unsustainable rural livelihoods and increased poverty levels in the Okavango? (ii) What is the role of basket making in diversifying rural income and promoting sustainable rural livelihoods and cultural tourism in the Okavango? (iii) How effective is the existing basket institutional framework in promoting basket products in tourism development, and how can they be improved? It is assumed that the role of basket making in improving rural livelihoods in the Okavango Delta will be better understood when these questions are addressed.

In terms of structure, this paper is organised as follows: the first section deals with conceptual issues, that is, the concept of sustainable

rural livelihoods and income diversification. The second section describes the study area, the third section explains the method used in the study; the fourth and main body of the paper deals with the results of the study; and the fifth and last section concludes the paper.

SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME DIVERSIFICATION

In an era of mounting poverty in the Okavango, questions on alternative sustainable rural livelihoods options emerges. These issues are generally debated and well understood when using the framework of sustainable rural livelihood and income diversification. That is, the concepts of sustainable rural livelihoods and income diversification are common on issues of rural development, poverty reduction and environmental management. The sustainable rural livelihoods framework shows how, in different contexts, sustainable livelihoods are achieved through access to a range of livelihood resources (natural, economic, human and social capitals) which are combined in the pursuit of different livelihood strategies (agricultural intensification, livelihood diversification and migration) (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998; D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003).

The sustainable livelihood framework centres on people, its aim is to help stakeholders with different perspectives to engage in structured and coherent debates about the factors that affect livelihoods, their relative importance and the way in which they interact. This, in turn, should help in the identification of appropriate entry points for support of livelihoods. The sustainable livelihood framework can be applied at a range of different scales, from individuals, to households, to village, region or even nation, with sustainable livelihood outcomes assessed at different levels (Scoones, 1998). In this paper, the framework of sustainable livelihoods will mainly focus at individual household and village levels in an attempt to provide a broad understanding for the Okavango region. It is also important to note that central to the sustainable framework is the analysis of a range of informal and formal organisational and institutional factors that influence sustainable livelihood outcomes (Scoones, 1998). As a

result, attention in this paper will also be given to existing institutional and organisational structures of basket making and how they can be improved to achieve sustainable rural livelihoods in the Okavango Delta.

In the context of rural livelihoods, the diversification of income sources is a key factor influencing the well being of households in rural areas (D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003). By engaging in diversified activities, households may be seen as trying different options which they hope will generate an adequate and sustainable livelihood that is resilient to shock (D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003). People diversify their livelihoods for a variety of reasons at different times and in specific places. Sometimes the main motivation is survival, at other times it is to save and accumulate resources or to improve their standard of living (D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003). In the Okavango, the motivation for communities engaging in basket making is to achieve income diversification and sustainable rural livelihoods.

STUDY AREA

The study area on which this paper is based is the Okavango region located in northwestern Botswana (Figure 1). The Okavango is home to 122000 people (CSO, 2002) who belong to various ethnic groups such as Bayei, Bakgalagadi, Basarwa (San), Bambukushu and Batawana. These ethnic groups speak different languages, however, Setswana is the official language in Botswana and is spoken in most parts of the country including the Okavango. For illustration purposes, the study used the villages of Shakawe, Xhaoga and Nxamasere as a case study. The villages are located on the western part of the Okavango River Delta.

All the three villages of Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga are composed of the following key ethnic groups: Basarwa, Bakgalagadi, Bambukushu and Bayei. In addition, Shakawe has small numbers of Baherero, BaGxereko, Mambundu, Banyemba and Bavumba who are former refugees from Angola and Namibia. Shakawe has a total population of 4389 people. Xhoga has a population of 390 people and Nxamasere has a population of 1328 people (CSO, 2002). These villages were chosen as the study site mainly because

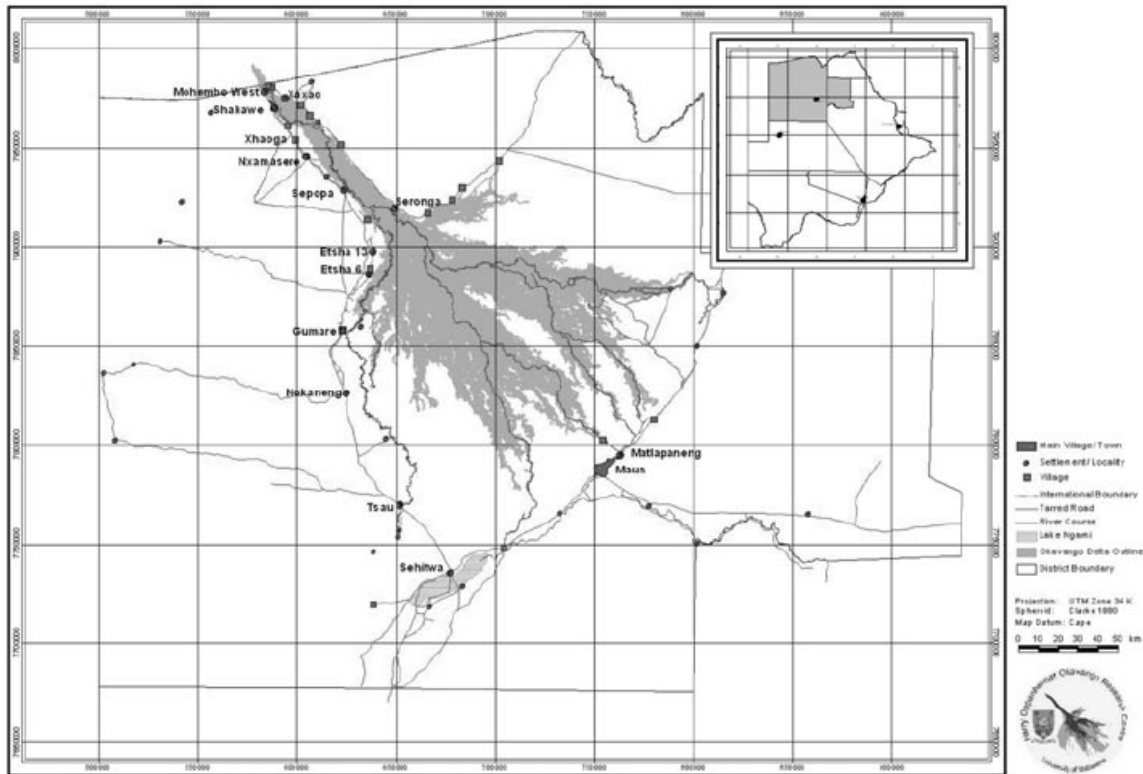


Figure 1. Map of the Okavango Delta showing the study villages (source: Mbaiwa, 2003a). Reprinted with permission.

basket making has become one of the dominant economic activities of rural communities in the area.

METHOD

This paper is based on the results of a survey that was carried out between January and March 2003 by the author. The survey used both primary and secondary data sources. Secondary data collection included a review of literature on sustainable rural livelihoods and income diversification. It also included a review of existing handicraft literature with emphasis on published and unpublished reports and documents on basket making for the tourism market in the Okavango Delta and Botswana.

Primary data collection on the other hand involved the administration of structured and unstructured questionnaires to a total of 87

(58.0%) of the 150 basket weavers at Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga villages (Conservation International–Botswana, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in the study area provided a list of 150 weavers). In terms of sampling, all the basket weavers who managed to turn up for meetings called by this author were interviewed, both as individuals, and later in focused group discussions. At Shakawe 23 weavers turned up for the meeting, 30 at Nxamasere and 34 at Xhaoga. The initial intention was to interview all of the 150 basket weavers in the three villages. However, time and financial constraints could not allow the author to return to the study area and interview weavers that were not present at the time when fieldwork was conducted. Basket weavers were interviewed in order to determine their perceptions on baskets as tourism products and the extent to which baskets

contribute to household income earnings and diversification.

Informal interviews were conducted with officials at the Trust for the Okavango Cultural and Development Initiatives (TOCADI) in Shakawe and Conservation International (CI)-Botswana in Maun. Interviews were carried out with these NGOs because they operate in the Okavango where they encourage basket making as one of the rural development strategies. They were also interviewed to obtain their viewpoints on basket making as a cultural tourism activity and its potential to improve livelihoods in the area. Although an unstructured questionnaire was designed and used in the informal interviews, the method involved a more or less ordinary discussion, where at times free response questions were asked to dig deeper about particular issues. Informal interviews were also carried out with three social workers and three traditional leaders (chiefs) of the respective villages of Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga. This was carried out in order to assess the extent of poverty in the Okavango and whether basket making can significantly contribute to the improvement of sustainable rural livelihoods in the Okavango Delta.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Factors affecting rural livelihoods and the poverty situation in the Okavango

Households in sub-Saharan Africa engage in a wide range of economic activities in order to create livelihoods with which they are able to achieve food security (D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003). In the Okavango, the main economic activities for the rural people are rainfed and *molapo* (flood recession) crop farming and livestock production (Bendsen and Meyer, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2003a). Fishing, hunting and gathering of veld products are carried out to supplement agricultural production (Mbaiwa, 2002). In the recent past, natural factors such as droughts, declining flood levels in the Okavango River and disease have had negative impacts on these livelihood strategies. In relation to arable farming, Bendsen and Meyer (2002) noted that it has been repeatedly hit by short- and long-term fluctuations of natural

conditions. For example, in 1978–1979 it was hit by high floods, in 1964–1965, 1982–1988 and 1995 by severe and prolonged droughts, and by a gradual change in the flood distribution patterns over the past 100 years. At present, there are about 48 900 ha of land cleared for crop cultivation in the Okavango (Bendsen and Meyer, 2002), however, only about 20% is presently ploughed (Agricultural Statistics Unit, 2002). Bendsen and Meyer (2002) note that even though crop fields are cultivated, yields depend largely on unpredictable environmental conditions, and in recent years there has been a high rate of crop failure and reduced harvesting. The drying of the Thaoge River, formally the main distributary of the Okavango River, resulted in some of the major *molapo* (flood recession crop cultivation) areas between Habu and Gumare being abandoned (Bendsen and Meyer, 2002). Bendsen and Meyer note that the drying of the river resulted in a considerable decrease of the total area suitable for flood recession crop cultivation. In addition, the outbreak of vector-borne diseases killed or drastically decimated the cattle population. Consequently, crop farmers were faced with drought power shortages and had to reduce their cultivation (Bendsen and Meyer, 2002),

The low crop yields has caused crop farming to decrease in ranking in terms of importance as one of the key livelihood options among subsistence farmers in the Okavango. Fidzani *et al.* (1999) reports that in 1996, crop farming was ranked by 41.0% of the households as the second most important source of household income after livestock. By 1999, households ranking crop farming had dropped to 37.3%, this figure remained the same in January 2003 (Mbaiwa, 2003a). Drought and the reduction in flood levels in the Okavango Delta was mentioned by respondents at Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga villages as the main reason why crop farming is no longer an important livelihood strategy in their villages (Mbaiwa, 2003a). This indicates that crop production is failing to meet the food demands of the people and cannot be regarded as a sustainable livelihood strategy in the Okavango Delta.

As for livestock farming, the outbreak of contagious bovine pluro pneumonia (CBPP), or simply known as the cattle lung disease, in

1995 resulted in the killing of over 300000 cattle in the Okavango (Fidzani *et al.*, 1999). All farmers had their cattle killed in an attempt by Government to control the disease. The killing of cattle caused major social and economic hardships, some of which are irreversible (Fidzani *et al.*, 1999, p. 49). During the cattle eradication exercise, Government gave farmers an option of either getting 100% compensation in the form of money or getting 70% money with 30% provided later in the form of cattle when the disease was brought under control (Fidzani *et al.*, 1999). According to Fidzani *et al.* and ACORD (2002a–d), most households opted for 100% cash compensation. The majority of the households used the cash compensation for routine household expenditure to meet their immediate needs. After the cash compensation had been exhausted, people became reliant on Government food handouts and labour intensive public works or drought relief (employment) programmes. As drought relief programmes are temporary, the result has been high poverty levels in these villages. The duration of the projects do not usually exceed 18 months (ACORD, 2002a). A decade after the eradication of the cattle in the Okavango, the rural communities whose livelihoods relied on livestock production, particularly on cattle, find themselves trapped in poverty (Mbaiwa, 2003a,b). To traditional farmers in the Okavango, cattle are important for milking, meat, drought power, sale and for prestige. The killing of cattle has therefore deprived many households of this privilege. Fidzani *et al.* (1999) reports that in 1996, cattle were ranked by 52.0% of the households as the first most important source of household income and in 1999 it was ranked by only 7.2% of the household to first position. In January 2003, none of the households ranked cattle farming to first position, and 73.6% of the households said they no longer practice livestock farming since the killing of their cattle during the cattle lung disease outbreak in 1995 (Mbaiwa, 2003a). These results show that agricultural production is no longer an important sector that is able to promote sustainable livelihoods in the Okavango Delta.

The reduced agricultural (crop and livestock) yields affects the livelihoods of the

people of the Okavango and contributes to increased poverty levels. According to the NWDC (2003, p. 243) 'poverty in the Okavango is widespread'. The NWDC notes that the majority of the people living in the Okavango can be classified as rural and live in poverty. About 47% of the people of Botswana live in poverty (MFDP, 1997; Government of Botswana, 2002). An estimated 60% of the poor households are found in rural areas and nearly 70% of them are the very poor households (CSO, 1996; MFDP, 1997; Silitshena and McLeod, 1998; Government of Botswana, 2002). The Ministry of Agriculture survey by Fidzani *et al.* (1999) noted that poverty levels in the Okavango are on the increase mainly as a result of the failure of crop and livestock production from the late 1990s. Studies by ACORD (2002a–d) also found that malnutrition and poverty in some villages in Okavango have since increased after the eradication of cattle in the district in 1995–1996. ACORD (2002a, p. 2) notes that unemployment and lack of employment opportunities, low income levels, lack of food, few food sources, crop failure and crop damage by elephants, lack of capacity to advocate for their rights in the use of natural resources in the area, lack of institutional capacity, and limited options resulting from various factors such as limited education attained are some of the factors that aggravates poverty in the Okavango. The Conservation International–Botswana survey by Mbaiwa (2003a) also found that poverty in the Okavango is on the increase. In a population of 49642 people in the Okavango subdistrict, 1055 or 2.1% of them were classified and registered as destitutes and their basic human needs such as shelter, food and clothing are provided for by the Government. Informal interviews with social workers at Shakawe, Nxamasere, Xhaoga and Gumare in the Okavango cautioned that the destitute statistics provided are not accurate and do not show the true state of affairs on the ground. It is an underestimate as they are many cases that have not been reported, registered and assessed. Therefore, the destitute statistics in the Okavango subdistrict are likely to be higher. M. Watlala (personal communication, 2003) cynically noted, 'the poverty situation in the Okavango sub-district is very serious such

that very soon, we might find ourselves registering all households as destitutes'. The irony is that, although tourism rapidly grew in the past 10–15 years, becoming the second largest economic sector in Botswana (after diamonds) and by far the most important industry in the Okavango Delta, rural poverty has been on the increase.

Basket making as an alternative livelihood strategy

The decline of agricultural production in the Okavango suggests that alternative sources of food supply or livelihood strategies need to be developed. As a result, this paper assesses the potential of basket making as a cultural tourism product to find out whether it can be an alternative form of livelihood in the Okavango Delta. In carrying out this assessment, key economic activities such as basket making, crop farming, livestock farming, fishing, hunting, selling of reeds, traditional beer, and sewing were ranked in terms of the most important activity in sustaining household food supply and income generation in a Linkert scale of 1 to 7 at Shakawe, Xhaoga and Nxamasere villages (1 representing the most important economic activity and 7 being the least important).

Results showed that 55.2% of the weavers ranked basket making in first position, 39.1% placed basket making in second position and 5.7% in third position. None of the households ranked basket making from fourth to seventh position. As noted earlier, none of the households ranked livestock farming to first position, 4.6% said it takes second position, 12.6% said it takes third position, 8.0% fourth position and 1.1% ranked it in fifth position. A total of 73.6% of the producers said they no longer practice livestock farming since the killing of their cattle during the cattle lung disease outbreak in 1995. As for crop production, 37.9% of the households ranked it in first position, 34.5% in second position, 14.9% in third position and 1.1% in fourth position. About, 11.5% said it is an economic activity that is no longer carried out in their households owing to the lack of rain to support dryland farming. Other economic activities such as fishing, hunting, selling of reeds, traditional beer and sewing

Table 1. Perceptions of producers on basket as a tourism product. (Source: Mbaiwa, 2003a)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Basketry is a cultural tourism product	77	88.5
Basketry is not a cultural tourism product	8	9.2
Have no idea on cultural tourism products	2	2.3
Totals	87	100.0

ranked insignificantly low and are not regarded as alternative forms of income generation to sustain household needs. This, therefore, made basket making the most important and alternative livelihood option in the Okavango. As basket making offers an alternative source of income for rural villages in the Okavango, consideration on integrating it as a formal sector in the growing tourism industry should be made. This can be achieved through the promotion of cultural tourism.

The attitudes and perceptions of basket weavers towards basket making being made part of cultural tourism sector were also assessed. Results showed that 88.5% of the basket weavers noted that basket making could be a cultural tourism product that can increase their income earnings capacity (Table 1). The positive attitudes of basket weavers towards tourism development indicate that rural communities are aware that they can be part of the growing tourism industry in the Okavango Delta. This also shows that local communities are aware that basket products and other cultural artefacts can be used to diversify their households income and improve their livelihoods.

On the issue of what funds obtained from the sale of baskets are used for, 81.6% of the producers/weavers at Xhaoga, Nxamasere and Shakawe villages said they use the money to pay for the various household needs. This includes the buying of food, school uniforms for their children, clothing and bedding for their families, and meeting any other household need that may arise such as funeral expenses. These producers do not reinvest the money into other economic enterprises nor do they save it in a bank. This indicates that

Table 2. Ethnic composition of the basket industry. (Source: Mbaiwa, 2003a)

Ethnic group	Frequency	Percentage
Mombukushu	39	44.8
Moyei	6	6.9
Mokgalagadi	19	21.8
Mosarwa	18	20.7
MoGxereko	5	5.7
Totals	87	100.0

poverty in the Okavango has made most rural households live a 'hand to month' kind of life where income earned is easily used to meet household needs without any of it being reinvested or saved for future use. The development of cultural tourism with basket making as one of the cultural products has the potential to increase their income earnings, which in turn can be saved in banks or reinvested in other productive projects.

Because baskets generate income, particularly through sales in the tourism market, the different ethnic groups in the Okavango have since been attracted to it. This includes ethnic groups that previously did not make baskets. The Bambukushu were the first ethnic group to be involved in basket production for the tourism market in Botswana (Potten, 1976; Cunningham and Milton, 1982; Terry, 1986, 2000). As shown in Table 2, other ethnic groups such as the Bayei, BaXGxereko, Basarwa and Bakgalagadi that previously did not make baskets have since become attracted to weaving for the tourism market. However, the Bambukushu remain the dominant group in basket making in the Okavango Delta. This indicates that basket making is an important economic activity that different ethnic groups in the Okavango can adopt to promote sustainable livelihoods and cultural tourism.

The status of cultural tourism in the Okavango Delta

Although basket making has the potential to diversify income and improve rural livelihoods through cultural tourism, this tourism sector is currently poorly developed in the Okavango Delta (Mbaiwa, 2002). Cooper *et al.* (1998) note that cultural tourism can stimulate interests in, and conserve aspects of, the host's

cultural heritage. If tourists appreciate the cultural heritage of a destination, that appreciation can stimulate the host's pride in their heritage and foster local crafts, traditions and customs. In the Okavango Delta and the rest of Botswana, cultural resources such as museums, national monuments, historical sites and ruins, rock paintings, cultural events, sports and recreational activities remain untapped in terms of their potential contribution to the tourism sector (Government of Botswana, 1997). As a result, cultural tourism products such as baskets produced for the tourism industry in the Okavango Delta largely remain untapped.

Several factors contribute to the low level of cultural tourism in the Okavango Delta. For instance, enclave tourism, which has so far developed in the Okavango Delta, is criticised for its exclusiveness and lack of strong links with the domestic economy (Mbaiwa, 2003b). In enclave tourism, there is little interaction between tourists' enclaves and the local communities (Bank of Botswana, 1999) or between the operators and the host communities (Mbaiwa, 2002). For example, most high-cost tourists fly into Maun and upon arrival are immediately flown to exclusive camps in the Delta. Maun is the main arrival and departure centre for tourists visiting the Okavango. Most of these tourists never come to visit any local village in the Okavango to learn how local people live. This situation reduces the interaction between tourists with the local people and eliminates the chances of tourists spending money in villages found in the Okavango Delta such as Shakawe, Nxamasere and Khaoga. The marketing of the Okavango Delta in developed countries as a tourism destination mostly emphasises the wilderness nature of the wetland without describing its socio-cultural structure. This marketing strategy results in tourism having weak linkages with the domestic economy, especially with cultural production, which would otherwise boost the rural economy. In addition, this strategy is likely to create a false impression on overseas tourists that the Okavango is complete wilderness without human beings living in or within it.

If cultural tourism was to be developed in the Okavango, this would result in higher

to rural people. However, basket weaving is carried out on a part-time basis and producers work alone or with family members (Groth *et al.*, 1992; Mbaiwa, 2003a). This means that basket making provides low incomes to producers who would otherwise derive better employment and financial benefits from the sector if it was formal and carried out on a full-time basis.

The informal nature of basket making, the lack of local basket institutional structure and the fact that basket weavers are illiterate and unable to determine basket prices results in low incomes accruing to these producers. This comparison is made in relation to the profit/prices that basket dealers make when selling the same products in tourist outlets. For example, on average, the annual income earned by a basket producer was estimated to be P140 in 1985 and P215 in 1991 (Terry, 1994). In 2003, basket prices at Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga ranged from about P150 to P250 for three to four small baskets and about P250 to P400 for one to two large baskets (Mbaiwa, 2003a). In tourism outlets in main tourist centres, basket dealers sell a small basket they bought at around P50 at an average price of US\$100.00 or P600 each (Botswana Gazette, 2003). A large basket that dealers buy from producers at P250 can sell at an average price of US\$250 or P1500 in tourist centres such as airports in Maun or curio shops in lodges and hotels (Mbaiwa, 2003a). The low prices that basket dealers pay when buying baskets shows that basket producers in the Okavango Delta do not get the market value of for their products. This fact was acknowledged by TOCAD, CI-Botswana and Government social workers in Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xahoga villages during informal interviews.

Challenges of basket making as an alternative livelihood strategy

Women dominate basket making in the Okavango Delta. All the 87 respondents in this study were women. Women dominate the basket sector mainly because basket making is the traditional domain of women in Botswana (Terry, 1999). Women also dominate basket making because many rural men have had more opportunities in the formal sector, espe-

Table 3. Education level of basket producers. (Source: Mbaiwa, 2003a)

Ethnic group	Frequency	Percentage
Never been to school	52	59.8
Never completed primary education	14	16.1
Completed junior secondary education	4	4.6
Never completed junior secondary education	2	2.3
Completed O' level	6	6.9
Tertiary	1	1.1
Non-formal education (adult education-primary)	8	9.2
Totals	87	100.0

cially regular contracts at the mines in South Africa throughout the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s as opposed to women who always remained at home (Terry, 1999; Mbaiwa, 2003a). Men no longer go to the mines in large numbers hence the need for them to be involved in basket making and promote cultural tourism. Men can take part in areas such as harvesting of fibre leaves used for basket weaving and of marketing of basket products. This can make basket production a shared activity where both men and women provide for household needs.

Basket making in the Okavango is also dominated by illiterate people. Table 3 shows that about 59.8% of the basket weavers are illiterate and never had any formal education, and 16.1% never completed primary education. The dominance of basket making by uneducated people is partly a result of the fact that educated individuals migrate to urban centres where there are opportunities in terms of sustainable incomes in the formal sector. If educated people are not attracted to basket making, it will be difficult to promote cultural tourism in which baskets are the key product. This is because tourism requires high levels of entrepreneurship and management skills to meet the demands of the tourism market. It also needs better organisation, planning and marketing. Someone who has never been to school might not easily learn entrepreneurial

Table 4. Ages of basket producers in the Okavango. (Source: Mbaiwa, 2003a)

Age of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 20 years	2	2.3
21–30 years	16	18.4
31–39 years	14	16.1
40–49 years	30	34.5
50–59 years	16	18.4
60 years and above	9	10.3
Totals	87	100.0

skills that go with a successful cultural tourism sector. As such, empowerment of basket weavers, particularly through entrepreneurship and managerial skills in the tourism business, is important for the sustainability of cultural tourism. However, the dominance of basket making by people who never had formal education should not only be perceived in negative terms. This is because basket making is one of those economic activities that provide an opportunity for uneducated rural members of society to participate in income-generating activities as is the case in the Okavango.

Basket making in the Okavango is also unable to attract young people, hence old people dominate the sector. Table 4 shows that the majority (63.2%) of the weavers were 40 years and above and only 36.8% of them were under 40 years of age. That basket making attracts few young people can be attributed to low prices within the sector and opportunities available for young people in the formal employment in urban areas. This is also noted by Groth *et al.* (1992) and Terry (1999) who state that young people are generally not attracted to craftwork in Botswana because it is informal and generates low incomes. The relatively small numbers of young people undertaking basket making is part of a wider phenomenon where there are very limited opportunities in rural areas (whether agricultural or non-agricultural) in Botswana. The implications are that basket making skills might die out if there are few young people to whom older basket weavers can pass on their skills. The dying out of basket making skills means the loss of indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous knowledge is a crucial component of the traditional handcraft industry. It constitutes an important area of knowledge that should be preserved if basket production is to have a place in the growing tourism industry in the Okavango Delta. As a result, income levels of basket production in rural areas will need to be raised substantially to attract more young people.

Environmental effects of basket making

The commercialisation of basketry in the Okavango Delta has led to the overharvesting and scarcity of natural resources used for making baskets in some parts of the Okavango Delta (Cunningham, 1988; Terry, 1999; Kgathi *et al.*, 2002b; Mbaiwa, 2003a). For example, in 1983, 97% of the basket makers in Etsha and 55% in Gumare and Tubu complained about the scarcity of the fibre leaves from the palm tree (*Hyphaene petersian*) that are used to make baskets. This resulted in weavers travelling longer distances than in the past to collect the leaves (Cunningham, 1988). About 79% of the basket makers in Etsha perceived a scarcity of *Bechemia discolor* dye resources in 1983. About 57% of the basket markers in Gumare and Tubu also noted the scarcity of the plant in 1985 (Terry, 1986). The *Hyphaene petersian* (mokola), *Euclea divinorum* (mothalkola) and *Berchemia discolor* (montsentsila) were also noted to be scarce in Gumare and Tubu in 1985 (Terry, 1986). Kgathi *et al.* (2002b) and the Kalahari Conservation Society (KCS, 2002) also indicate that the scarcity of raw materials for making baskets seems to have worsened at present when compared with the situation in the 1980s in the Okavango. Kgathi *et al.* (2002b) note that basket makers at Etsha travel 10 km to Jao to collect raw materials for basket making (Kgathi *et al.*, 2002b). About 44% of the basket makers said overharvesting of the palm trees was the main cause of resource depletion, 30% blamed elephants, 17% the lack of rainfall, 4% fire (KCS, 2002). Mbaiwa (2003a) notes that 53.0% of the basket weavers at Nxamasere complained of scarcity of palm leaves and travel roughly 15 km to collect the resource. At Xhaoga, the scarcity of palm leaves was noted by 55.9% of the weavers who are now forced to travel 20 km to collect the fibre, and 97.0% of

weavers at Shakawe also noted the scarcity of palm leaves and travel 45 km to collect it.

The overharvesting and utilisation of raw materials used for basket making has the potential of resulting into a 'tragedy of the commons' scenario and this could negatively affect the development of cultural tourism in the Okavango Delta (Hardin, 1968). Hardin used the concept of 'tragedy of the commons' to describe the overgrazing of common pastures in England during the eighteenth century. Because there was no control over the use of pastures, villagers could bring their cows to graze on common pasture as much as they wanted to obtain maximum benefits at no cost. As the number of cows and herders kept on increasing, the grass became scarce and the pasture became destroyed owing to overgrazing and all the cows died. Mbaiwa (2003a) notes that basket weavers at Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga harvest palm leaves in the same area, this also applies to the other villages in the region where harvesting is done around village settlements. The harvesting of raw materials in the same areas with no control to govern or monitor the use of resources directly affects basket making and livelihoods. It also has the potential to affect prospects of a sustainable cultural tourism industry in the Okavango Delta.

The effectiveness of basket making institutions

The discussion on the role of local institutions in natural resource management is a recurrent theme in southern Africa (D'Haese and Kirsten, 2003). Local institutions play a significant role in sustainable development, particularly in poverty alleviation, livelihoods, empowerment of the rural population, and natural resource management (Scoones, 1998). Local institutions are important custodians of indigenous knowledge systems especially for the production of cultural tourism products such as baskets, and also intermediaries between the Government and the communities (Kgathi *et al.*, 2002a).

In the Okavango, apart from Ngwao Boswa in Gumare and Etsha Cooperative which respectively sell their products to Botswana Craft and Botswana Christian Council (BCC),

Table 5. Perceptions of weavers on registering a basket making trust. (Source: Mbaiwa, 2003a)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
We need a registered trust	82	94.3
We do not need a trust	3	3.4
Have no idea	2	2.3
Totals	87	100.0

basket weavers are not organised in formal registered business enterprises. This includes basket weavers at Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga villages. The Botswana Craft and the BCC respectively established Ngwao Boswa and Etsha Cooperative as monopolised outlets from which they can buy baskets without competition whenever their agents visit the area. As a result, basket weavers listed under Ngwao Boswa or Etsha Cooperative have an obligation not to sell their products to anyone else but to the two respective organisations. However, this obligation is not always observed as some producers also sell to TOCADI, CI-Botswana and private investors. Ngwao Boswa and Etsha Cooperative are therefore not institutions that can represent the interests of basket producers in the tourism market but those of the two buying organisations. The lack of basket institutions that represents the interests of weavers results in most weavers failing to collectively determine basket prices as they are generally not aware of the market value of their products. An organised and effective basket association is necessary as it would promote awareness to weavers about the value of basket products in the tourism market, local participation in basket production and regulations on natural resources conservation.

When asked whether they perceive it a good idea to form a registered trust or association to represent their interests and promote basket making in the tourism industry, about 94.3% of the weavers at Shakawe, Nxamasere and Xhaoga villages supported the idea (Table 5). The overwhelming support by weavers to form a registered trust of their own indicates the need for basket producers to be empowered to become independent in production and marketing of baskets in the tourism market.

These results also indicate that if basket weavers were organised into formal trusts or associations, they would significantly contribute to the development of cultural tourism in the Okavango Delta. Trusts would be able to coordinate participation of basket weavers in cultural tourism especially in issues of policy formulation, implementation, marketing of basket products and natural resource management. Studies in natural resource management have shown that local people benefit more from natural resources in their local environment and also come to appreciate regulations on the use of these resources if they are organised in trusts to coordinate their interests (Mbaiwa, 2002).

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that crop and livestock farming have until recently been the key economic and livelihood strategies among rural communities in the Okavango Delta. However, natural causes such as drought and diseases have affected crop and livestock production, resulting in decreased yields and increased poverty. Because of these shocks, alternative options need to be identified in an attempt to diversify and promote sustainable rural livelihoods. This paper argues that basket making and basket products have the potential to diversify incomes and improve livelihoods in the Okavango. Therefore, a comprehensive and integrated tourism approach will need to be developed if basket products are to become a key source of income for the rural people. The approach should recognise the role of cultural tourism in rural development and should make it part of the growing tourism industry in the Okavango Delta.

Cultural tourism will require basket production to be transformed from a part-time and informal business activity to that which is full-time and formally registered according to the laws of Botswana. Empowerment of basket producers particularly through entrepreneurship and managerial skills in the tourism business should also be given priority for cultural tourism to succeed. Basket producers will also require an effective institution or trusts to promote their participation in tourism. Through basket associations or trusts, weavers

can have their needs and interests such as determining basket prices and marketing of their products in the tourism market addressed.

This paper also argues that if basket production is to raise rural incomes and promote sustainable livelihoods, it needs to attract young people as well as the educated. This can promote the preservation of traditional or indigenous knowledge and skills in basket weaving which are otherwise an important aspect of cultural tourism. As tourism is a new and rather highly organised sector, educated individuals would be able to address issues of marketing and management which may be difficult for the old and uneducated to learn quickly. Young and educated individuals can be attracted to basket making if incomes from the sector are raised and sustainable. This can be achieved with the full integration of basket production in tourism development in the Okavango Delta.

Finally, natural resources used for basket making are becoming scarce and are threatened with depletion in some parts of the Okavango Delta due partly to overharvesting. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that natural resources are used sustainably to avoid a 'tragedy of the commons' scenario (Hardin, 1968) because all weavers harvest raw materials used to make baskets in the same areas around their villages. The participation of basket weavers in natural resource management should be recognised. This is because local natural resource users are often assumed to have a better understanding of the environment in which they live as well as greater interest and ability to sustainably manage resources around them (Mbaiwa, 1999). In the event that basket weavers form trusts, there is a likelihood that such organisations will ensure natural resource conservation through local participation and promote a basket industry that takes into consideration rural livelihoods, community development and natural resource conservation.

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