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Planning for Sustainability: The Okavango Delta Management Plan

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Synopsis and Learning Outcomes

Integrated management plans are paramount for ensuring the sustainability of resources which have many stakeholders, such as the Okavango Delta in Botswana. The Okavango Delta is the largest Ramsar site. Ramsar refers to the Convention on Wetlands of international importance. It is an intergovernmental treaty that mandates member states to conserve and use wetlands wisely through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world (Ramsar, 2013a). The Okavango Delta is also one of the largest inland deltas and a World Heritage site. Signatories to the Ramsar Convention are expected to develop and implement plans for designated Ramsar sites to promote conservation of the wetlands in their respective countries.

In compliance with the Ramsar requirements, the Botswana Government launched the Okavango Delta Management Plan (ODMP) in 2002 and it was completed in 2007. The aim was to “develop a comprehensive integrated management plan for the conservation and sustainable use of the Okavango Delta and surrounding areas” (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2008). Consequently, the plan was designed to provide a framework and contextual guidelines for existing and future individual area and sector plans.

The case study presents the planning process followed in the development of the ODMP to highlight best practices in integrated resources management. The process shows how stakeholders with different interests were brought together and their views and interests incorporated in the formulation of the plan. Lessons learned from the planning process, for example the importance of open communication channels between stakeholders,

especially local communities who normally do not have a voice in planning processes, are highlighted to show how the process has empowered stakeholders and given them confidence in planning activities. Whilst the ODMP plan formulation can be credited as being a product of thorough stakeholder input and support, there are still a lot of challenges facing the successful implementation of the ODMP including the role of other riparian states (Angola and Namibia), centralisation of decision making and structural challenges, financial mechanisms, competing priorities at the national level and selling the plan.

After studying this case, learners should be able to:

- 1 Understand and apply stakeholder theory to analyse the complexities of integrating stakeholders in the development of the Okavango Delta Management Plan.
- 2 Apply an integrated planning approach as stipulated by the Ramsar Convention to evaluate the Okavango Delta Management Planning process.
- 3 Propose appropriate strategies for the successful implementation of the Okavango Delta Management Plan.

■ Background

Botswana has for a long time relied on its mineral wealth, especially diamonds. Over the years the government has sought alternative ways of diversifying its economy. Tourism has therefore been identified as an alternative engine of growth and is currently the second greatest contributor to foreign currency earnings after mining (Government of Botswana, 2003). Among the Southern African Development Community (SADC) members, tourism has grown significantly in the past years as reflected in Table 3.1. In 2007, Botswana was ranked third in terms of arrivals among the SADC countries, but in terms of receipts it was ranked fourth. In addition, tourism contributes 6% of the country's Gross Domestic Product and 10.3% of total employment in Botswana, or 1 in every 9 jobs (WTTC, 2007).

The Okavango Delta in the North West of Botswana is a competitive tourist destination in the Botswana market, contributing over 6.5 per cent of Botswana's GDP. The Okavango River Basin is shared by three riparian states, Angola, Botswana and Namibia. Angola is upstream from Namibia, while Botswana is downstream (see Figure 3.1). The Okavango Delta Ramsar site covers an area of around 55,374 square kilometres (Magole, 2008). The Okavango Delta is a diverse and ecologically rich ecosystem. 147 species of mammals, 188 of trees, 570 of birds and 2150 of plants are currently known to exist in an environment comprising seasonal floodplains, lagoons, dry grassland, mopane forests and palm islands (Barnes *et al.*, 2006).

Table 3.1: International tourism arrivals and receipts in SADC countries 2005-2007

Country	International Arrivals (1000 arrivals)			International Receipts (US\$ Million)		
	2007	2006	2005	2007	2006	2005
Angola	194	121	2010	-	75	88
Botswana	1455	1425	1474	546	537	562
Lesotho	300	357	304	-	36	31
Madagascar	344	312	277	176	159	183
Malawi	714	638	438	-	24	24
Mauritius	906	788	761	1299	1007	871
Namibia	-	833	778	434	384	348
Seychelles	161	141	129	285	228	192
South Africa	9090	8396	7369	8418	7875	7327
Swaziland	870	873	839	-	74	78
Tanzania	692	628	590	1037	950	824
Zambia	897	757	669	-	110	98
Zimbabwe	-	2287	1559	-	338	99

Source: UNWTO (2008) cited in Manwa (2011).

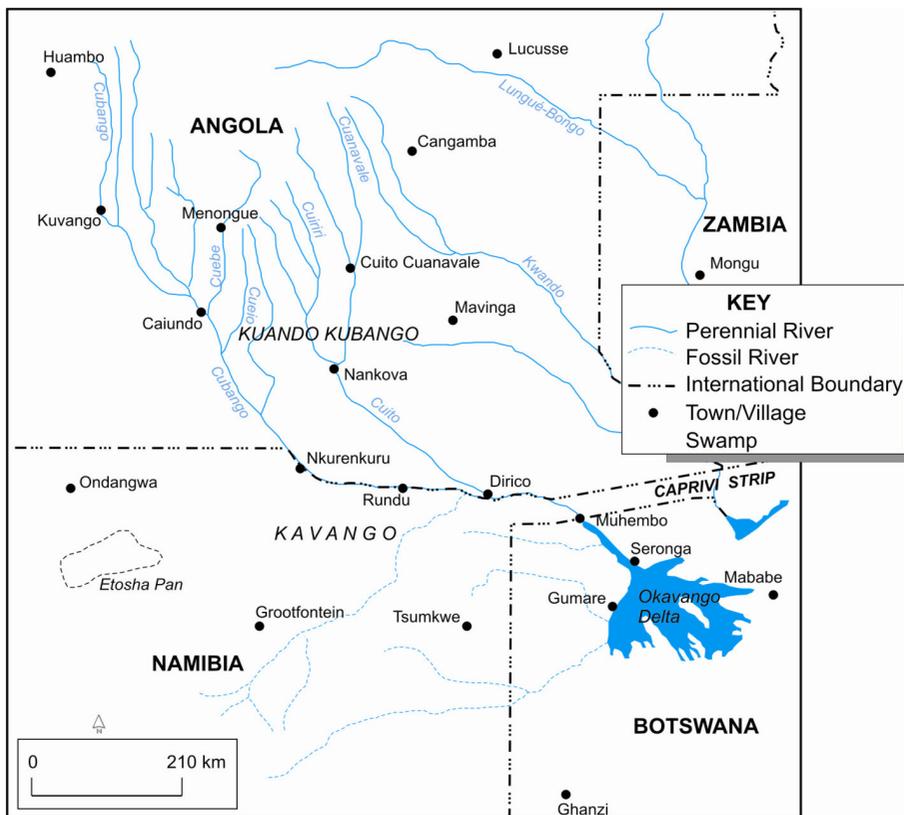


Figure 3.1: Location of the Okavango Delta