

Tourism Impacts on Subsistence Agriculture: A Case Study of the Okavango Delta, Botswana

Philippa Harrison¹ and Brij Maharaj²

¹University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

*²Howard College, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-mail: maharajB@ukzn.ac.za*

KEYWORDS Tourism. Okavango Delta. Enclaves. Subsistence Agriculture

ABSTRACT The booming tourism industry in the developing countries has been widely viewed as a source of investment, employment and foreign exchange. There is an assumption that the economic benefits of tourism will trickle down to stimulate other sectors of the economy, including agriculture. The government of Botswana, for example, is grappling with the task of developing a tourism policy that will maximize its goals of rural job creation, revenue generation from foreign exchange, conserve and protect wildlife, and be compatible with the cultural norms of its people. As the rural community in the Okavango Delta shifts its focus from agriculture to tourism, several concerns emerge. A key contention of this paper is that a major challenge facing the Okavango Delta region in the twenty first century is an attempt to support the tourism industry without compromising the traditional livelihoods of its local inhabitants. More specifically, as tourism increases economic growth and employment opportunities, it is becoming difficult for local inhabitants to sustain traditional subsistence agricultural livelihoods. As increasing numbers of rural, communal agricultural people migrate to urban areas, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature warned that the uncontrolled expansion of human activities, predominantly associated with tourism, and the foreign control of resources is resulting in the abandonment of many traditional practices, including agriculture, and threatening the livelihoods of the Okavango Delta's inhabitants. Hence, the Okavango Delta presents a unique opportunity to study the impact of tourism on rural agriculture, to observe the negotiation and competition which occurs between global tourism and local agriculture, and to review the inevitable transformation of local culture, economy and physical landscape.