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The value of the Okavango delta: A natural resource accounting approach

by

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ABSTRACT

Economic valuation of the Okavango Delta can support decision making in a complex socio-economic environment in which economic development depends on a deep understanding of the value of biodiversity. The use of a natural resource accounting framework in determining the value of goods and services is crucial. The total economic value of the Okavango Delta was estimated by using primary (household valuation) and secondary data. A natural resource accounting framework was used. The components of the total economic value were the composition of wild herbivores and vegetation, and the functional values, which comprised direct use values of wild herbivores, river reed, thatching grass, wild fruits, fuelwood and palm leaves, indirect consumptive values of honey production, carbon sequestration, livestock grazing, milk production, non-consumptive use of tourism, and existence and bequest values. The values of the composition and function are expressed in per/ha values. The value of the composition of wild herbivores was estimated at P1 444 992 400 (US\$ 294 850 699.2) or US\$ 27.4/ha, while the functional value was estimated at P185 913 117.4 (US\$ 37 527 840.96 or US\$ 619.77/ha. Of the estimated direct use values of vegetation, river reed had the highest value of US\$ 29.0/ha, while the highest value among indirect use values was that of milk production (US\$ 8.5/ha). These values of selected resources reflect the contribution of the value of biodiversity of the Okavango Delta to the overall economy of the country and represent initial estimates of costs to society if these resources are lost. The estimated values can be used to raise awareness among decision makers of the economic benefits of conserving the Okavango Delta. Overall, the findings showed that the various components of the total economic value of the Okavango Delta were comparable to other wetlands in the region.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Motivation	2
1.3 Statement of the problem	4
1.4 Research objectives	7
1.5 Overview of methodology	8
1.6 Structure of the thesis	9
Chapter 2	10
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 General characteristics of the country	10
2.2.1 Physical characteristics	10
2.2.2 The economy of Botswana	13
2.2.3 The relevance of the study to the economy of Botswana	18
2.3 The Okavango Delta	19
2.3.1 Location and resources	19
2.3.2 Social and Economic Significance of the Okavango Delta	23
2.3.3 Property right regimes in the Delta	27
2.4 Overview of Natural Resources Management Policies, Programs and Acts	30
2.4.1 Water Resources	30
2.4.2 Tribal Land	31
2.4.3 Agricultural Resources	31
2.4.4 Fish resources	31
2.4.5 Conservation and utilization of wildlife	32
2.4.6 Tourism	33
2.4.7 The conservation and management of elephants	33
2.4.8 National parks and wildlife conservation	34
2.4.9 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands	35
2.4.10 Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)	35
2.4.11 Conservation and utilization of wetlands	36
2.5 Chapter Conclusion	37
Chapter 3	38
3.1 Introduction	38
3.2 The concept of sustainable development and capital theory	38
3.2.1 Some indicators of sustainability	44
3.3 National Income Accounting and its deficiencies	48
3.4 What is Natural Resource Accounting?	51
3.5 Application of natural resource accounting in resource management	53
3.5.1 Mineral Resources	53
3.5.2 Forest resources	57
3.5.3 Water and fish resources	59

3.6	The status of natural resource accounting in Botswana.....	59
3.7	Biodiversity conservation and resource accounting	61
3.7.1	Definitions, value and loss of biodiversity	61
3.7.2	The structure, composition, and function of an ecosystem.....	64
3.8	Chapter conclusion.....	74
Chapter 4	75
4.1	Introduction.....	75
4.2	Conceptual framework.....	75
4.2.1	Physical accounts	76
4.3	General methodology.....	87
4.3.1	Direct consumptive use.....	87
4.3.2	Direct non-consumptive use values	91
4.3.3	Indirect consumptive use values	94
4.3.4	Non-use values (Preservation values)	98
Chapter 5	101
5.1	Introduction.....	101
5.2	Accounting for stock of wild herbivores and vegetation of the Okavango Delta region: Composition values	101
5.2.1	Wild herbivores.....	101
5.2.2	Vegetation.....	106
5.3	Direct use values from the Okavango Delta	108
5.3.1	Wild herbivores.....	108
5.3.2	Vegetation.....	113
5.3.3	Water supply and use	123
5.4	Indirect use values.....	126
5.4.1	Honey production.....	126
5.4.2	Carbon sequestration.....	127
5.4.3	Livestock grazing.....	128
5.4.4	Milk production	131
5.5	Non-consumptive use values	132
5.6	Non-use values.....	139
5.6.1	Households' willingness to pay	139
5.6.2	Tourists' willingness to pay	141
5.7	Chapter conclusion.....	143
Chapter 6	147
6.1	Introduction.....	147
6.2	Summary of results	147
6.3	Discussion.....	148
6.3.1	Composition value for wild herbivores.....	148
6.3.2	Direct use value of herbivores	150
6.3.3	Direct use value of vegetation.....	150
6.3.4	Direct use value of water	152
6.3.5	Non-consumptive use value of tourism	153
6.3.6	Indirect use values.....	154
6.3.7	Non-use values.....	157

6.3.8	Comparison of the value of Okavango Delta with some specific land uses in Botswana.....	159
6.3.9	The expected impact of water abstraction on total economic value	161
6.4	Conclusions.....	162
	References.....	165
	ANNEX.....	191

List of Tables

Table 1	Sectoral shares of GDP (%) (Current prices).....	14
Table 2:	Percentage contribution to total export and import by most important items (1994-2002).....	15
Table 3:	Tourist arrivals from the top 10 countries	16
Table 4	Revenue by type of fee from national parks (1999- 2001) (Botswana Pula)	17
Table 5:	Tourism related share of GDP at market prices 1996/1997	25
Table 6:	Estimates of stocks of traded wild herbivores using non-citizen prices.....	103
Table 7:	Estimates of compositional values of selected wild herbivores using citizen prices	105
Table 8:	Identified growth forms and number of species in the Okavango Delta	107
Table 9:	Estimates of direct consumptive use values of selected wild herbivores during using non-citizen prices	110
Table 10:	Estimates of direct use values using citizen prices.....	112
Table 11:	Percentage of households harvesting vegetation resources in the Okavango Delta.....	114
Table 12:	Estimated direct use value of vegetation in 2003	120
Table 13:	Conservative estimate of the value of vegetation in 2003	120
Table 14:	Plants parts used as traditional medicine.....	122
Table 15:	Estimates of direct use value of water in the Okavango Delta.....	125
Table 16:	Direct use value of water using minimum tariff.....	125
Table 17:	Honey production under optimal environmental conditions	127
Table 18:	Honey production under sub-optimal environmental conditions	127
Table 19:	The Value of carbon sequestration	128
Table 20:	The value of grazing for a Tswana breed and a cross breed between Tswana and Brahman cattle	130
Table 21:	Estimated grazing value for pure Tswana cattle breed.....	130
Table 22:	Milk production for Tswana breed and Jersey breed during 2003	132
Table 23:	Milk production for a pure Tswana cattle breed during 2003	132
Table 24:	Road travel cost of tourists	136
Table 25:	Air travel costs of tourists.....	137
Table 26:	Revenue by type of fees.....	137
Table 27:	A conservative estimate of road travel cost of tourists.....	138
Table 28:	Overall direct non-consumptive use value for tourism in 2003	138
Table 29	Maximum households' willingness to pay for the preservation of the Okavango Delta.....	140
Table 30:	Minimum households' willingness to pay for the preservation of the Okavango Delta.....	140

Table 31: Maximum tourists' willingness to pay for the preservation of the Okavango Delta.....	142
Table 32: Minimum tourists' willingness to pay for the preservation of the Okavango Delta.....	143
Table 33: Summary of various economic values of the Okavango Delta.....	146

List of figures

Figure 1: Location of Botswana.....	11
Figure 2: Map of the Okavango Delta	20
Figure 3: A Satellite image of the of the Okavango Delta during the wet season.....	21
Figure 4: Components of total economic value	86