

Background Ground

The Okavango Basin drainage system lies within the greater Kalahari Basin- a huge but shallow, sand covered depression stretching from the Northern Cape in Southern Africa to just south of the Equator in Gabon. The filling of the greater Kalahari Basin took place after the break up of the super-continent, known as Gondwana, between 150 and 130 million years ago. The Okavango River starts its journey on the Bie Plateau in Angola, where it is known as the Cubango River. It descends quite steeply from this rocky plateau, flattening out onto the Kalahari sands that form the greater part of its Catchment. The gradient becomes shallow and the river meander slowly through swampy floodplains in a broad valley. Where it forms the northern border of Namibia, it becomes the Okavango River, taking on its main tributary the Cuito River which also rises in the Angolan highlands. Three main channels emerge from the panhandle to distribute water across the fan, the Nqoga, Jao and Thaoge channels. These are separated by floodplains, swamps and sandy islands, spreading out to form a vast alluvial fan (12,000sqm) known as the Okavango Delta. The Okavango River Basin is also a trans-boundary river involving three countries Angola, Namibia and Botswana with a population of over 600,000 dependent on the river for their livelihoods; in Namibia the river supports just over 200,000 people.

Functions and Mandates of OkBMC

OkBMC's Vision

The ecologically sustainable natural resource management and integrated development of the Okavango River Basin towards the socio-economic benefits, sensitisation and sharing responsibilities regarding utilization of this river basin.

OkBMC Functions , among others are:

To promote community involvement and participation in the protection, use, development, conservation, management and control of water and wetland resources, including groundwater in its water management area through awareness, education and other appropriate activities;

To properly manage the basin in coordination with the agency provided for in Section 17 of the Water Resources Management Bill;

To develop a water research agenda, together with the Water Resources management Agency, appropriate to the needs of water management institutions and water users within its water management area;

To exercise any such additional functions as the Minister may delegate under Sections 14 (l) (d) and 15 of the Water Resources Management Bill.

Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) in Okavango River Basin

Introduction

The Okavango River Basin is shared among Angola, Namibia and Botswana, hence requiring shared responsibilities for sustainable utilization and management of the basin resources (Bethune, 2008). The river supports livelihoods by providing water, food, grazing and tourism for the populations in the three riparian states. Each country has ambitious plans to maximize utilization of the basin resources for economic benefits.

Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) is a scientific and technical fact-finding analysis which seeks to identify the causal chain and the root "cause-and-effects" of problems (or with the potential to impact) the integrity of the Okavango River Basin.

To understand the ecology and impacts of developments on the Okavango River Basin, a TDA study was carried out in three riparian states which will guide a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) based on the findings.

Methodology of the TDA

In Namibia, the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) commissioned Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) in 2008 to conduct TDA study on the Okavango River Basin. The study focused on Land Use, Health, Hydro-electrical Power Development, Irrigation Developments, Water Supply and Sanitations, Fisheries, Birds, Water Quality, Wildlife, Socio-Economics, Hydrology and Ecosystems; among others (Rajapakse, 2009).

Results of the TDA:

The studies found that communities' livelihoods mainly along the river heavily depend on the river basin resources; both direct and indirect use such as fish, reeds, tourism, grazing, wood harvest, crops, water, etc. Tourism contributes high household income among other basin resources and Botswana recorded highest benefit from the Okavango River system contribution to livelihoods and regional economy.

Irrigation activities use high percentages of water in Kavango region with irrigation water demand of 3.77 m³/s. 82% of the rural population in the region has no access to proper sanitation services. Poor communications and lack of flood early warning systems from Angola contribute to poor preparation for flood disaster in the Kavango region. Based on TDA findings, the National Action Programme (NAP) for Namibia was revised to prioritize issues of national importance.

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Fig 1 Direct use values of Fish, Floodplain grazing, Reeds and Tourism of the Okavango River Basin

Way forward: Namibia has already held two meetings aimed at reviewing the studies findings and prioritize activities. Similar NAPs have been developed for Botswana and Angola to encompass ways to manage challenges highlighted by TDA studies. All three NAPs resulted in a Draft SAP for the Okavango river basin which will be jointly implemented to address threats linked to the basin.

References: Bethune, S. (2008) Background reader: Okavango River Basin. Unpublished report
Rajapakse, C. (2009) Update on the "Environmental Protection and Sustainable Management of the Okavango River" Project. Okavango Basin Management Committee workshop, Rundu, July 2009



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Establishment of Okavango Basin Management Committee (OkBMC)



The Okavango Basin Management Committee (OkBMC) was established in November 2008 with a mandate to coordinate and management activities within the Basin for the sustainable resources use of the Okavango Basin, as stipulated in the Water Act No. 24 of 2004.

Okavango Basin Management

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