

Impacts of Cultural Tourism on the Domestic Utility of Traditional Baskets: Case of Gumare and Etsha 6 Villages in the Okavango Delta, Botswana

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study carried out in Gumare and Etsha 6 villages of the Okavango Delta in Botswana. The study examined the relationship between development of tourism and production of traditional baskets in the area. Methods used for the study include a total of 100 household survey, questionnaires administered across the two study sites, two focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The findings indicate that different factors may have worked individually or in concert to necessitate a shift in focus for production of baskets from domestic to commercial wares. Importantly, the paper underlines the importance of tourism in availing a market for the baskets thus considerably influencing the nature of production and changes observed in the qualities of the baskets over time. The paper concludes that the observed changes are necessary if the basket production industry is to be sustained. Essentially, therefore, these changes may be conceived of as signs of evolution on the part of the craft and adaptation by producers.

Keywords: *traditional baskets, cultural tourism, commoditization, Okavango Delta, Botswana.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is currently ranked the second biggest contributor to Botswana's GDP and also touted as the most promising alternative engine of economic growth away from the mining (diamond) industry (Department of Tourism 2000, 2001; Mbaiwa 2005). However, Botswana's tourism is mainly wildlife and scenery based, thus raising the need to explore other potential tourism areas that would help relieve pressure from the current wildlife and scenic resources, specifically the Okavango and Chobe areas (Department of Tourism 2001; Moswete and Mavondo 2003; Mbaiwa 2004; Mbaiwa and Sakuze 2009). Development of cultural tourism product presents one of the niche areas. Oleynik (1999: 96) argues that "this area of cultural tourism remains almost unexploited...with...the

only internationally recognized brand name being Bushmen”. The indigenous culture of Bushmen or *Sarwa*, nonetheless, represents only a fraction of the country’s diverse cultural melting pot. Mbaiwa (2004) opines that the cultural aspect of Botswana tourism has been neglected in policy for long, despite its apparent significance to the overall development of the industry. Some of the notable efforts to broaden the tourism product mainly entail a collection of products and activities captioned and subsumed under the term ‘eco-tourism’ (Department of Tourism 2000).

Tourism development is known to impact both the living and non-living environments either positively or negatively. Some of the positive impacts include, inter alia; improvement of the lives of local communities, helping to preserve the resources base, creation of employment for local communities, helping in the revival of disappearing societal cultural items as well as bringing infrastructural development to the rural areas (Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin 2000; Grunwald 2002; Mbaiwa and Sakuze 2009; Bachleitner and Zins 1999). Conversely, tourism development, if not well managed, can have negative impacts that in turn threaten its own continued existence (Holden 2000). Literature is awash with such examples, including among others economic leakages, inflation of local prices, enclavisation, pollution, physical damage and depletion of resources, demonstration effect, prostitution, racism, use of vulgar language and crime (Keyser 2009; Mbaiwa 2003, 2005b; Nunkoo and Ramkisson 2009). Cohen and Browning (2007) observe that cultural tourism development in particular, can negatively impact on local cultures including crafts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CULTURAL TOURISM

While the field of cultural tourism has “grown in importance and complexity” (Walle 1996: 874), the concept itself like many others in the social sciences does not enjoy a commonly accepted definition (Chhabra 2010). According to Boissevain (2006: 3) “cultural tourists are interested in the lifestyles of other people, their history and the artifacts and monuments they have made”. To this end, we are reminded that culture (or a people’s way of life) entails family patterns, folklores, social customs, museums, monuments, historical structures, landmarks, religion, art and handcrafts, among others (McNulty 1991; Weiler and Hall 1992). Cultural tourism is, therefore, used to denote visits aimed at experiencing and seeing other people’s cultural expressions, as well as buying of such expressions either at or away from their locality. Put differently, cultural tourism suggests travels to consume other people’s cultures (Richards 2001; Mbaiwa and Sakuze 2009) or as Ondimu (2002) asserts, cultural tourism is about

travel which is geared mainly towards seeing a people's lifestyle in the past and at present.

For their part, Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, and Chute (2010: 541) argue that "cultural tourism, at its core, involves the representation and study of 'difference' and 'otherness'". In this sense, cultural tourism is not just about consumption of, but also about learning about other cultures and their differences. Therefore, Richards offers a double barreled definition where cultural tourism; technically refers to "all movements of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, arts and drama outside their normal place of residence" while conceptually it captures "the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural need" (Richards 1996: 24). Mbaiwa and Sakuze (2009) acknowledge that cultural tourism may benefit both the visitors and the host communities by encouraging learning and wider appreciation of others' cultures as well as economic success and cultural preservation in host areas. Essentially, cultural tourism loosely applies to most visits to cultural attractions and spaces with the aim to witness, enjoy, experience, consume or learn about local cultures. Botswana is generally known for its wildlife and scenic beauty with the result that the biggest visitor segments comprise safari and wilderness enthusiasts from long distance markets such as Europe, North America and the Far East (Statistics Botswana 2015). In addition to the wilderness experience, visitors also have an opportunity to sample some of Botswana's culture despite the general lack of development on this area of the country's tourism offering (Saarinen, Moswete and Monare 2014; Moswete, Thapa and Lacey 2009). In many cases these long haul travelers use the opportunity of being in Botswana to take home some kind of souvenirs in the form of traditional baskets. These baskets are usually made by local women (and sometimes men) who in turn, either sell them directly to buyers or utilise middle men such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other retailers like airport and hotel souvenir stores to sell their crafts (Mbaiwa 2004). This paper considers commercialization of traditional baskets in the Okavango Delta, including their sale and purchasing at places of production, curio shops, hotel souvenir stores as well as from retailers.

2.2 CULTURAL COMMODITIZATION

According to Cohen (1988), commoditization denotes a process wherein 'things' acquire status of goods as a result of their being evaluated mainly according to their exchange value. The primary idea is that whatever 'thing' is being considered should have its value stated clearly in terms of market price. It gives them the type of exchange value that they otherwise would not inherently possess. In tourism, this has come to entail packaging of cultural activities and artifacts to be availed to the tourist market (Appadurai 1986; Swanson and Timothy 2012).

This process is otherwise known as commoditization of culture (Medina 2003). In the tourism literature, this concept is often discussed alongside that of authenticity. Authenticity in this case refers to the realness or genuineness of a cultural aspect (Dolezal 2011). It is often argued that commoditization of a culture leads to a modification of that culture, while sometimes it is maintained that the idea of packaging authentic cultural aspects for the tourism market is a concept that borders of temporally distancing the Other (Martin 2010).

The debate on cultural commoditization has been going on for quite some time now. One argument related to this concept suggests that commoditization of culture for touristic purposes leads to that culture losing its meaning for the locals (Boissevain 2006; Greenwood 1977; MacCannell 1973). Cohen (1988) and Holden (2000) admit here that when local cultures are produced and packaged for the tourist market, they may lose their intrinsic value as a part of the local cultural identity. Put differently, Steiner and Reisinger (2006), observe that tensions arise between the use of culture for community expression and for economic generation. It is argued that commoditization of local cultures may result in expropriation of such cultures by investors (Greenwood 1977; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2004) from outside the community. When local communities lose their right to exercise control over their cultures in a tourism destination, uncertainty and resentment may result (Dyer, Aberdeen and Schuler 2003). Consequently, the locals lack the necessary drive to continue producing and identifying with these cultural aspects. Cohen (1988) observes that such aspects of culture as ceremonies, rituals, festivals, costumes and folk art are capable of being commoditized; a phenomenon common in developing countries and other ethnic areas around the world.

Another argument on the same topic asserts that the process of packaging and selling culture may assist in attributing value to the concerned culture. That is, transforming non-market cultural aspects into touristic goods may help to add economic value to such aspects (Cohen 1988). In turn, this is said to promote local people's enthusiasm in maintaining their local and ethnic identity (McKean 1989). Subsequently, it is thought that communities may manage to embrace, preserve and sustain those traditions that would have otherwise disappeared (Cohen 1988; Mbaiwa 2011). From the highlights above, one can note two conclusions, being that; 1) there is a general agreement that tourism development can lead to commoditization of cultures, and that 2) cultural commoditization can have either positive or negative implications for the value of these cultures. Following a similar line of thought, this paper acknowledges that the advent of tourism development in the Okavango Delta has induced the local basket producers to start weaving baskets for sale. It outlines ways in which this commercial production has resulted in changes on the baskets woven by Gumare and Etsha 6 village producers.

3. DESCRIPTIONS OF STUDY AREA AND METHODS

3.1 STUDY AREA: GUMARE AND ETSHA 6 VILLAGE

Both Gumare and Etsha 6 villages are located along the western banks of the Okavango River, or panhandle. The estimated distance by road from Maun is 252 km for Gumare and 265 km for Etsha 6 (Roodt 2007; NDDP 6: 2003– 2009). Maun is the regional administrative centre for the Northwest District (also known as Ngamiland District) council, which covers the Okavango Delta, Moremi Game Reserve and several villages. Of the two villages, Gumare is the oldest. According to Tlou (1985) and Nyathi-Ramahobo (2002) the origins of Gumare village can be linked directly to the first arrival of the Bantu speakers in the Okavango area, between 1750 and 1800. These, Okavango's, earliest Bantu speakers commonly known as the BaYei had fled the wars from their previous land of DiYei in Northwestern Zambia (Tlou 1985). Nyathi-Ramahobo (2002) posits that the actual spelling for this ethnic name is Wayeyi, rather than the 'Tswanaised' BaYei version. This ethnic group was said to constitute 40 per cent of the total population of North West District in 1991, thus making it by then the largest single ethnicity in the entire district (Nyathi-Ramahobo 2002). Unfortunately the 2001 and 2011 census reports do not have any records on ethnicity for comparative purposes. Therefore, it is impossible to determine with any level of certainty whether or not this ethnic group is still the largest at present. However, without any specific reason to believe that these demographics may have been drastically changed in the last two decades one may surmise that the status quo probably remains. Subsequently, it may not be surprising that all Bayeyi respondents who participated in this survey were from Gumare village, with any other ethnicity in the village represented by only a handful of respondent.

Sunjic (nd) links the origins of Etsha 6 to the 1960s when 3 300 refugees fleeing from the Portuguese attacks (that characterized Angola's independence struggle) were received in Botswana and settled in the Ngamiland area. The last 377 of these immigrants received their Botswana national identity documents between 2003 and 2005, although they had long considered themselves Botswana citizens; a position held in common with the authorities. The number (6) in the name of the village simply denotes the serial number of the village as part of a cluster of villages in the area. Holistically, the 13 villages comprising Etsha extend over the area located at 19°07'S, 22°18'E along the panhandle (Cunningham and Milton 1987). The inhabitants of Etsha 6 are predominantly Hambukushu, commonly referred to by mainstream Batswana as Bambukushu. Consequently, 91% of all Bambukushu respondents in this survey were from Etsha 6. This constituted 97% of the overall Etsha 6 sample. In fact, only 1 individual in Etsha 6 was from a different ethnic group (Bakalaka). According to the latest population census report, the population of Gumare is almost 3 times bigger than that of Etsha 6. The report estimates that in 2011, Gumare population was 8 532 while that of Etsha 6 was 3 130 (Statistics Botswana 2012)

The selection of these two villages for the study was premised on the fact that these are two of the most prominent basket making villages within the Okavango Delta area. Their proximity to one another was an important consideration for logistical reasons.

3.2 STUDY METHODS

Data collection for this research followed the idea of triangulation. Triangulation denotes an approach to research whereby more than one method of data collection is used (Jick 1979; Denzin 1978; Olsen 2004). According to Modell (2005) triangulation enables validation of research results. That is, rather than the results reflecting the character of a particular method, they rightfully reflect the character of the trait under investigation, a situation referred to by Denzin (1978) as ‘between (or across) methods’ triangulation. Specifically, the study utilized focus group discussions, key informant interviews, household survey as well as a review published and unpublished materials on basketry in the Okavango Delta. Olsen (2004: 3) contends that “the mixing of methodologies e.g. mixing the use of survey data with interviews, is a more profound form of triangulation”.

The questionnaire comprising both closed and open ended questions was prepared and pre-tested in the small village of Matsaudi, located about 15 kilometres north east of Maun. Following this exercise, some questions were either removed, added or modified prior to the commencement of actual data collection in the two selected sites. Between Gumare and Etsha 6 village a total of 100 questionnaires were administered to individual household members in the community. A household was used as a unit of analysis. Conceptually, a household is conceived of as a group of one or more persons, related or unrelated, living together under the same roof in the same dwelling, eating from the same pot or making common provision for food and other living arrangements (Central Statistics Office 2003/04). Thus, it was borne in mind that a dwelling may consist of one or more households depending on the nature of the foregoing arrangement. A dwelling is a compound of one or more structures or buildings with identifiable boundaries. Technically, a household has been define as comprising an average of 2,5 persons. Through simple standard calculation, numbers of households in Gumare and Etsha 6 could be estimated at (3413) and (1252) respectively. Given that differences between the household populations of the two villages a simple weighting approach (Israel 1992) was used to determine the proportions of respondents from each village. In the end, of the 100 questionnaires administered, 70 (70%) were targeted at Gumare residents while the remaining 30 (30%) were administered in Etsha 6. For every household identified in either village, any member 18 years or above and present on the day of the interview was eligible to participate. A single interview per household rule was applied in all instances. Selected individuals were asked, in a face-to-face interview setting, to list the ways in which they had used the traditional baskets over the years. They were

asked to explain if they had noticed any significant changes in the ways that they used the baskets over the years as well as to indicate reasons behind such observed changes. The idea was to establish whether the local communities attribute any of the changes to commercialization.

Key informant interviews involved village elders, preferably those who had practiced basket production before. Even those local gurus that had not yet retired from the practice, but had been weaving for a considerable period of time, were consulted. These informants were considered ‘information rich cases’ (Patton cited in Merriam 2002) given the depth of their presumed knowledge on basket making in the Okavango Delta. The type of sampling here was a combination of purposive and snowballing in that the researcher identified the initial respondent through consultation with community leaders. This respondent in turn identified other typical village elders as were defined by the researcher (Bless and Higson-Smith 2000). The researcher found the results of this approach to be quite valuable to the overall objective of the study. The six (6) key informants selected (three {3} per village) were asked to explain ways in which the utility of their traditional baskets have changed over time.

Two focus group discussions (i.e. one in each village) were conducted. Each group comprised between 8 and 12 participants. The participants were active basket weavers drawn from two local weavers’ groups (Ngwao Boswa in Gumare and Etsha 6 Weavers Group in Etsha 6). These were the only active weaver’s groups in the two villages at the time. Therefore, their selection was made on account of convenience. While there was no intention to select a particular sex or age group at the expense of others, it turned out by default that the two groups were made up of female members only. The groups generally had a good mix of ages, ranging from young to elderly weavers. Mbaiwa (2003) used FGDs before to investigate issues of basket production and marketing in the West of Ngamiland District. In his subsequent evaluation of the method Mbaiwa (2003: 210) maintained that it enables the researcher to “probe deeper on issues that were not fully addressed in the individual interviews”. The information gathered through this method is aimed mainly at supporting findings from the survey. The following subsection presents the results and discussions of the findings from the study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY USES OF BASKETS IN GUMARE AND ETSHA 6 VILLAGES

Survey respondents were requested to enumerate the various traditional uses of baskets in the Okavango area. Nine (9) different uses were identified. Majority of respondents listed storage of agricultural harvest (29), winnowing (24), food storage (18) and hauling of agricultural produce (14) in that order. Other uses were decoration (8) and commercial (4) while water storage, carrying clothes and storage of cutlery, put together, accounted for about 7% of all responses received. By contrast, when asked to list contemporary uses of baskets, majority listed commercial (31%), decoration (28%) and winnowing (18%). Other uses listed were storage of agricultural harvest (11%), food storage (7%) and haulage of agricultural produce (5%). Key to note from these results is that the percentages or frequencies presented here only represent the number of times a certain use was mentioned. It is also important to observe that this question was closed. It provided a list of options for respondents to select from, with the opportunity to add any other use that may have not been included in the list of options. Furthermore, each respondent could select as many of the options as they deemed relevant.

These results, therefore, show that in the past traditional baskets were mainly used for domestic purposes. Their utility was particularly geared towards arable agricultural production activities. According to Lambrecht (1968), baskets in the Okavango were historically made as a necessity and used for almost every occupation in the home and farm. In other words, a traditional basket was a utilitarian object that almost everyone needed to possess in the area. The tradition of basket making was very popular and was passed from generation to generation within the household. Basket making also kept women and girls busy as a pass-time activity. Weavers sat together under tree shades and shared the knowledge of production, thus facilitating learning by the young ones. Furthermore, since baskets were central to the traditional lives of communities, a basket was also seen to confer some form of social status and prestige on its owner. Those households that were able to produce their own baskets did not have to beg, borrow, barter or work for the baskets from their neighbours. Instead, they were the ones to receive requests from other members of the community. Being able to lend or give someone else a basket in exchange for either labour or some other valuable such as grain was something that enabled the owner to be independent.

It is also demonstrable through these results that currently, baskets are viewed mainly as commercial or decorative products. Essentially, responses to this question do not necessarily suggest that commercial and decorative functions of baskets were completely absent in the past; neither do they suggest that usage of baskets for agricultural purposes has disappeared altogether in contemporary set

up. Instead, they only reveal a reversal in terms of functional scale for either class of uses. While some of the baskets produced continue to perform the functions traditionally associated with them, their production is increasingly seen as presenting an opportunity for earning an income. In essence, baskets are produced more and more for outside markets. As Mbaiwa and Darkoh (2009) suggest, their market value has basically transformed their production into a rural livelihood improving option. Thus, the results demonstrate a significant shift in terms of basket uses over time.

4.2 MOST PROMINENT TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY USES OF TRADITIONAL BASKETS IN THE OKAVANGO DELTA

While results of the preceding question could have potentially demonstrated the popularity of each usage both in the past and at present, an objective question was asked for the respondents to specifically identify the most prominent uses of baskets in the past and at present. An overwhelming majority (88%) indicated that storage of agricultural harvest was the most prominent use in the past, followed by food storage (6%), commercial (4%) and winnowing (2%). For most prominent contemporary uses the respondents identified commercial (75%), decoration (23%) and storage of agricultural harvest (2%) as the first, second and third in that order.

Clearly, survey respondents in this study believed that while the functional use of storing agricultural harvest was at the heart of basket production in the past, the current focus for basket production is predominantly geared towards business. Information from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions generally supported this scenario. When they were asked about the possible explanations for this observed shift, a number of reasons were given. On the one hand, some focus group members noted that the advent of tourism in the Okavango Delta has led to an increased commercial value of baskets, thus making it profitable to produce them for sale. On the other hand, it was argued by both focus group participants and some key informants that, with the occurrence of poor and unpredictable rain patterns in recent times, crop yields from rain-fed arable farming have been steadily declining. Accordingly, this is thought to have led to less demand for use of baskets as storage and hauling items.

Crucially though, some members of the focus group discussions (made of active basket weavers) noted that the availability of industry produced containers have also provided alternative use items for farmers, thus leaving weavers an opportunity to seek other markets for their baskets. One of the key informant interviews raised an important point to the effect that traditional utility baskets can be very durable if well made. Therefore, according to her, even if there was no external market for baskets or alternative industry produced containers, production for domestic purposes would inevitably decline given that one basket

acquired by a farmer could be used for several years without need to acquire a replacement. She noted;

for example, imagine a basket used for storage or winnowing. Most of the pieces you find around in this area were either made or bought by owners a very long time ago. In fact some of them were inherited from parents and grandparents. But even as we speak, these are still in use and there are no signs that we will discard them anytime soon (Key Informant 2; 71 year elderly woman; personal communication).

Plate 1. *Winnowing baskets in use at home. Note their relative size and age.*



(Photo: Monkgori Lenao, 2008)

She showed the interviewer to her own pair of winnowing baskets (plate 1) that her grandchildren were using at the time of the interview. This observation was consistent with the observations made by the interviewer during visits to some homesteads around the villages. In all the households visited, the interviewer observed that almost all the baskets currently in use were reasonably aged. While some were still completely intact, some were showing some signs of wear. Even those that had visibly undergone some rounds of repair still looked to be in good overall condition. Essentially, they were still in greatly usable condition.

4.3 RELATIVE SIZE AND UTILITY OF BASKETS

In order to understand the manner in which the shift from producing baskets for their domestic utility functions to producing them for sale have impacted on the

nature of baskets themselves respondents in both the survey and interviews were asked to describe a basket produced for domestic use purposes. Respondents and interviewees generally referred to size as an important characteristic. They observed that the size of a basket would differ considerably depending on the purpose for which it is made. For instance, baskets made for domestic use would generally be large. They noted that, baskets produced for haulage of agricultural produce would be relatively big, while those produced for storage would be much larger. The explanation here is that haulage baskets have to be carried around or moved from one point to the next. Therefore, it should be big enough to carry reasonable amounts of material, while also being small enough to allow a human being to carry it. For storage baskets they generally emphasized that there is no need to constantly move the basket around, meaning that there is no need to worry about whether or not humans can carry it. Instead, the concern is about being able to store as much material as possible in a single basket at a time. A storage basket is commonly called *sesigo* (a loose equivalent of silo) in Setswana. When asked to describe a typical size of *sesigo*, one of the focus group discussion participants said; “it should be able to carry an average man standing upright with his hands spread apart” (FGD participant, 25 years old woman; personal communication). Similar findings have been observed elsewhere. According to Cohen and Browning (2007) basket producers in San Juan Guelavia, Oaxaca, Mexico made large utility baskets prior to the advent of commercialization. However, since the 1940s, when baskets began to be produced for sale, weavers produce predominantly smaller ones. Reasons given for this change in size include that; smaller baskets were more attractive to tourists and; market prices for smaller baskets were lower than those of larger baskets. This makes smaller baskets more affordable to the buyers and thus makes more economic sense for the producers.

Survey respondents also noted that with the shift to commercial production the relative size of the baskets produced have become smaller. They reasoned that production and completion of these baskets are faster than those of larger ones. Out of curiosity, they were then asked for their individual opinions on whether or not they thought commercially produced baskets best represented the local basket making culture. Forty four (44) respondents thought they did while forty seven (47) thought they did not. The remainder was non-committal. A cross tabulation of the survey results indicates that the majority of Etsha 6, respondents were concerned that commercialization of traditional baskets had led to significant changes on various aspects of the baskets compared to their Gumare counterparts. Out of the thirty (30) respondents in Etsha 6, twenty three (23) believed baskets produced in their village were not a good representation of their traditional basket making culture, four (4) thought they were, while three (3) did not know. In Gumare, forty three (43) indicated that commercial baskets were a good representation of their culture, twenty one (21) mentioned that they were not, while remainder had no idea.

4.4 BUSINESS COMPETITION AND INNOVATION

As Mbaiwa and Darkoh (2009: 222) put it, “basket making has resulted in income generation for the rural communities in the Okavango delta. As a result basket making is one of the cultural artifacts that play an important role in the development of cultural tourism in the Okavango Delta”. In line with the foregoing argument, survey respondents and key informants observed that there is an ever growing demand for baskets of the Okavango Delta, from tourists. In response to this demand, basket producers are forced to compete among themselves for the market. In the process, certain aspects of the baskets are modified in ways deemed suitable to tourists’ tastes (plate 2). The sizes tend to get smaller to facilitate ease of transport and the decorations also increase both in terms of styles and intensity. This result mirrors the findings made by other studies in different settings. For example, from their study on traditional pottery carried out in Mexico, Revilla and Dodd (2003: 97) discovered that “functional Telavera objects such as plates, large vases and cups changed to more decorative items over the years”.

Plate 2. *Baskets lined up for sale. Note the relative size and decorations.*



(Photo: Monkgogi Lenao, 2008)

Some participants from this current study, especially the youth, preferred to call this trend innovation. According to them, every weaver learns to develop and fashion their own style in producing decorative baskets, with the result that everything varies from size to shape of the basket and even material used. In Gumare, it was observed that some youth had even started using some synthetic material such as plastic and dye instead of the traditional tree backs and roots. In

fact, information from key informant interviews suggests that some potential buyers sometimes produce decorative patterns of their own choice and request that they be used on the baskets that they would later buy. One key informant noted that, being able to adopt such foreign decorative patterns and excelling at making them calls for adaptability on the side of the weaver. In short, all weavers ought to be innovative in their trade and those who fail to adapt may not survive in the business.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Traditional basket production is one of the integral aspects of southern African cultures. Actually, the history of Bantu speaking communities in the region (believed to have migrated from the Central African region some 2000 years ago), is almost a history of basket making (Yoffe 1978). The study focused on finding out the different traditional uses of baskets in the Okavango Delta. It also examined the contemporary uses of these traditional baskets. The idea was to examine ways in which the commercialization has impacted on the traditional utility of the baskets. It was also necessary to establish whether the local people are able to link any changes in use to the advent of commercialization or any other force. The results have demonstrated that, the uses of traditional baskets in the villages of Gumare and Etsha 6 have been changing over the years. In the past, traditional baskets were produced primarily for domestic uses such as ‘storage of agricultural harvest’, ‘haulage of agricultural produce’, ‘winnowing’ and ‘food storage’. Study participants singled out storage of agricultural harvest as the most prominent traditional use. The greatest value attached to the traditional basket was domestic and social. Each household needed a basket for performance of certain day to day activities. In recent times, however, basket makers have increasingly focused on producing for commercial and/or decorative purposes. According to the results, the development of tourism in the Okavango Delta has created an external demand for traditional baskets. Production of traditional baskets is no longer seen as a simple social activity learnt and practiced as a pass time hobby. Instead, it has become a potentially lucrative business that earns income for producers and helps them improve their livelihoods (Mbaiwa 2004). The economic value attached to basket making has resulted in competition and subsequent innovation among producers.

Furthermore, commercialization of these baskets has meant that some of the qualities of the traditional basket are modified. For instance, the relative size of traditional baskets is now smaller. This is deemed necessary to facilitate ease of storage and transportation and display. This is in clear contrast to the relative size of a traditional utility basket which had to be relatively large in order to satisfy their required use purposes. The shapes and decorative patterns have also changed accordingly. Opinion on whether or not the observed changes represent traditional cultures is divided between those who agree and those who disagree. Certainly,

however, traditional baskets that were primarily domestic wares in the past are now more of touristic wares, since tourists like them for their aesthetic beauty and producers are able to earn a living out of producing them. In the end, the perceived or real shift from domestic and utilitarian to more market oriented basket production may not be treated as a bad practice. The fact that new dimensions, colours and shapes are being introduced to the production process may be seen a sign of evolution on the part of the craft or adaptation by the producers. In any case, if harnessing the economic potential of traditional baskets in the Okavango Delta may attract interest from the youth (Mbaiwa 2004) then continuity of production may be assured. A competitive market cannot be effectively served by non-creative producers who only stick to the known. Sometimes, in order to survive in business there is need to break away from the normative.

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