

# Ecotourism in Botswana: 30 years later

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## **Abstract**

Thirty years ago, conservationists, host communities, academics, and tourism practitioners perceived ecotourism as a panacea to conservation and poverty problems in tourism destination areas, especially in developing countries. This paper, therefore, analyses the performance of ecotourism as a tool designed to achieve improved livelihoods and conservation in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. The concept of ecotourism is debated and the context used in this paper is explained. Secondary data from published and unpublished sources on ecotourism in Botswana and the Okavango Delta are used. Primary data were collected through informal interviews with key stakeholders to update secondary data. Results indicate that in its 30 years of existence in the Okavango Delta, ecotourism had mixed results. That is, it succeeded in some areas and failed in others. Where ecotourism succeeded, it generated economic benefits such as income and employment opportunities, leading to positive attitudes of residents towards ecotourism and conservation. Where ecotourism failed, the lack of entrepreneurship, and managerial and marketing skills of local communities are cited as some of the key factors contributing to the failure of projects. Despite the failure of particular projects, this paper argues that ecotourism has proved to be a tool that can be used to achieve improved livelihoods and conservation. However, this depends on the socio-economic and political dynamics of host communities in a specific ecotourism destination area.