A Forced Policy Change? The Campaign Against the Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project (SOIWDP)

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http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.22004/ag.econ.295286

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A Forced Policy Change?

The Campaign Against the Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project (SOIWDP)

Alan Thomas
Onalenna Selolwane

August 1998
GECOU (Global Environment Change – Open University) is an interdisciplinary research group at the Open University. It consists of six researchers from five different disciplines: four from the Faculty of Social Sciences, namely Professor Andrew Blowers (Geography), Professor David Potter (Political Science), Dr Bernard Eccleston (Social Sciences), and Dr David Humphreys (Political Science); and two from the Faculty of Technology, namely Dr Susan Carr (Systems) and Alan Thomas (Development Studies and Systems).

There are also ten GECOU Research Associates working in Africa, Asia and Britain; Liz Chidley (NGOs and tropical deforestation in Indonesia); Oronto Douglas (NGOs and environmental conflict in the Niger Delta); Dr. Derek Gunby (NGOs and land degradation in Zimbabwe); Dr Kripa Ananth Pur (NGOs and Joint Forest Planning Management in Karnataka, India); Dr David Lowry (NGOs and the transnational trade in nuclear waste); Roger Mpande (NGO influence at the International Negotiating Committee on Desertification); Obasi Ogbonnaya (NGOs and the Kafin Zaki Dam, Nigeria); Uche Onyeagucha (NGOs and human environmental rights in the Niger Delta); Prof. Enoch Okpara (NGO influence at the International Negotiating Committee on Desertification); and Dr Onalenna Selolwane (NGOs and land degradation in Botswana).

The GECOU research examines the advocacy work of environmental NGOs in Africa, Asia and the North and their role in the policy processes which directly effect global environmental problems. The research commenced in 1993 and is ongoing. It has been funded primarily by the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK as part of its Global Environmental Change Programme and also by the Open University.

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A Forced Policy Change? -

The Campaign against the Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project (SOIWDP)

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This paper is based on investigations which formed part of "GECOU" (Global Environmental Change - Open University), an interdisciplinary research project based at the Open University between 1993 and 1996 and funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under its Global Environmental Change initiative. It was originally presented at the GECOU/Commutech Workshop on Environmental Policies and NGO Influence: Land Degradation and Resource Management, Harare, Zimbabwe, June 26-28, 1996. Acknowledgement is made to the ESRC and to the Open University for financial support.

1 Introduction: The Campaign, The Project and The Issues

"Diamonds are for Death!"

This was the slogan under which it was said that Greenpeace International might campaign against the proposal for a large-scale water engineering project in one of the world's most noted wetland ecosystems - the Okavango Delta in north-western Botswana. The Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project (SOIWDP) was actually intended to provide water for domestic requirements, for irrigation and for watering livestock as well as for diamond mining. In fact the latter use was dropped quite early in the political debate about the project. However, the connection with diamonds provided potential ammunition for some of the scheme's opponents, while indignation at apparently being threatened by unelected outsiders such as Greenpeace fuelled hostility on the part of the Botswana government towards Northern environmentalist NGOs.

Contradictory and conflicting interpretations abound in this case. There was disagreement not only about the relative benefits and environmental costs of the project but also about whether it would actually work in terms of assured provision of water. There are contradictory theories about what the case demonstrates about the efficacy or dangers of a confrontational
lobbying strategy, about the importance of certain aspects of democracy and the lack of other aspects, and about the positive or negative effects of internationalising an environmental issue. There are even conflicting versions of what actually happened that led to the project being dropped.

However, it is clear that there was an unplanned change of policy by the Botswana government. Some of the bare bones of the story are also not in dispute. Local people realised the development project was agreed when earth-moving equipment began arriving in the town of Maun towards the end of 1990. Some local environmentalists and others opposed to the project began to mobilise local communities against it and an action group was formed called Tshomorelo Okavango Conservation Trust (TOCT). Greenpeace International was contacted and sent a small team to undertake a study tour. The Botswana government halted work while it asked the IUCN (World Conservation Union) to commission a new independent study, and then "terminated" the project altogether just before the IUCN team's report was about to be delivered. However, the Botswana Government clearly reserves the right to develop the water resources of the Okavango as it sees fit at some time in the future.

1.1 The First Version of the Story

The story of the campaign against the SOIWDP is not well known outside Botswana. To the extent that it is known in, say, the UK, it is through publicity which portrays it as an unusual story of success by a local environmentalist NGO in an African country confronting its own government with international support from Greenpeace and others.

"In late 1990, residents of Maun heard that the Botswana government had approved a project to dredge the Boro River (one of the Delta's main channels) with the aim of providing a reliable water supply for the town. Other reports suggested that at least some of the water was destined for the Debswana diamond mine at Orapa.

Local residents and conservationists were opposed to the dredging, as previous attempts to do so in the early 1970s were unsuccessful and destructive. Furthermore, the EIA for the new initiative had been conducted by the project contractors themselves, and was therefore inadequate.

Upon publication of the proposal, and after a kgotla meeting with residents, Greenpeace threatened to launch a global 'Diamonds are for Death' campaign if the dredging went ahead. The government shelved the project pending an independent IUCN report. This report ultimately concluded that the dredging would not only disturb water flow, but also jeopardize the livelihood of local
farming communities who depended on the natural flooding regimes of the
Boro. Recent developments suggest that the government may not heed the
findings of the IUCN report, and proceed with dredging after all."

(Williamson 1994, p.12)

This summary is taken from a document largely compiled by Rick Lomba, a South African
conservationist, film-maker and activist who campaigned over many years to 'save' the
Okavango Delta and its wildlife. It was completed and published after his accidental death in
March 1994. Lomba's views can be judged from his words used in the foreword to the same
document: "Botswana can yet avert the complete devastation of its natural resources, but little
time is left, and decisive action must be taken now. If existing policies and land-use patterns
go on unchanged, the country looks set to be transformed into a wasteland" (Lomba 1994).
Lomba saw the SOIWDP as part of a general threat to the Okavango and the whole of
Botswana's wildlife and wilderness which came from both cattle and diamonds interests.

There are, however, certain points in the above version of events which are either inaccurate
or at least contested by other parties. In particular it was not Greenpeace that held a kgotla
meeting with residents, and Greenpeace denies using threats or suggesting adopting the
"Diamonds are for Death" slogan. The government at least claims that not all the local
residents were opposed to the dredging and some of those who were may have been
manipulated into opposition by being given partial information by conservationists. And while
not having officially adopted the IUCN report, the government looks very unlikely to try to
revive the same project: the SOIWDP as such is surely "terminated".

1.2 The Proposed Project

The Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project (SOIWDP) was a planned
large-scale engineering project involving dredging one of the main waterways of the
Okavango Delta, in the north-west of the country. The Okavango Delta is one of the world's
greatest wetlands, described as "the world's greatest oasis" (Scudder 1993, p.18). The
Okavango River, having risen in Angola, spreads out over the Kalahari sands to a varying
extent depending on the annual flood. 1989 maps show an area of nearly 16,000 sq.km.
including dry land within the delta. The perennial and seasonal swamp, water channels and
hundreds of islands form habitats for a large variety of birds and animals, so that the Okavango
Delta is world famous for its wildlife, with increasing importance for tourism. It also has
especial importance in an otherwise arid region in providing livelihoods for over 100,000
people of a variety of ethnic groups, including Yei, Batawana, Herero and Europeans.
Plans for engineering projects to utilise the water of the Okavango date from well before independence. One South African MP in the post-war Smuts government is quoted as arguing that if the then Bechuanaland were incorporated into South Africa "we could then develop the mighty Okavango River and, as it were, create a new province ... out of the desert-like Kalahari" (Hyman 1974, p.73). What became the SOIWDP was selected as the least environmentally damaging of several schemes recommended by studies in the 1970s. It was developed in greater and greater detail from 1982 to 1990 under a special interministerial committee of the Botswana Government, with the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) the lead agency. By 1985 terms of reference had been approved for a feasibility study, undertaken by the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (SMEC) of Australia and financed 50:50 by the Botswana and Australian governments. At the time the main emphasis was on "optimum use of land and water resources culminating in increased agricultural production benefitting the region and the nation" (SMEC 1987a, p.ix). However, other uses for water were also to be investigated. The SOIWDP was always intended to be "a multisectoral project for meeting a wide range of goals" (Scudder 1993, p.19). Water was to be provided not only for commercial irrigation, village-based flood recession agriculture, and communities and livestock throughout the area, but also for the domestic use of the population of the town of Maun and surrounding areas, and for the De Beers diamond mine at Orapa.

The scheme included four major components (see map, Figure 1) which were investigated in various combinations and versions. The first was "Lower Boro River Improvement Works", dredging and bunding 42 km of the Boro river (one of the main Okavango waterways), including 25 km north of the Southern Buffalo Fence which marks the southern boundary of the protected area of the delta. The purpose of this was to increase water inflow into the second component, a narrow reservoir about 100 km. long, commonly known as the Maun reservoir, which would be impounded behind dams to be constructed at Samedupi near the upper end of the Boteti river and at Toteng on the Nhabe river. This reservoir would provide water for Maun and via a control structure to be built at the western end would be capable of funnelling water seasonally into Lake Ngami - an important habitat for water birds which has been mostly dry since engineering works by the Anglo-American Corporation in the 1970s diverted water towards the Boteti and the Orapa diamond mine. It was also originally conceived as providing irrigation to increase the area of the traditional form of flood-recession agriculture known as molapo towards the north-west along the Thlamakane river. This was to have been done via the third component, another control structure, at Matlapaneng, which would create another reservoir behind it. Finally, the fourth component would consist of another dam some 200 km. further down the Boteti at Sukwane, with another reservoir, again about 100 km. long, with pipelines that would supply water to the diamond mine at Orapa as well as to a number of village communities.
The aims of the project changed considerably over the years it was being developed. As noted, the original primary aim was increased food production, this in the context of a national plan which at the time emphasised the goal of national food self-sufficiency. Thus the original SMEC study was to investigate the possibility of 10,000ha of irrigated crop production in the area between Maun and Lake Ngami, as well as 5000 ha of molapo farming to the north-east of the proposed Matlapaneng dam, in an area where there was at that time a much smaller area of molapo farming and the Molapo Development Project (MDP), funded by the German development agency GTZ and the Botswana government, had been working for several years to improve local farming techniques with appropriate technology. There was also originally an explicit intention that the SOIWDP should raise the living standards of the low-income majority living in villages of less than 500 inhabitants and in Maun.
However, poor soils and the probable lack of appropriate local labour led the feasibility study to conclude that the maximum viable area of irrigated commercial agriculture would be 1300ha. Labour shortage was also suggested as a limiting factor in the plans to increase the area of *molapo* farming (MDP 1989). In 1988 increased food production was dropped as the primary aim of the project. SMEC was asked to review the options giving priority to supplying water for Orapa and Maun (SMEC 1988). Then when very high cost estimates came in for some of the project components, and it became clear that the estimates of how much water would be diverted to the *molapo* area were unreliable, the Matlapaneng control structure and reservoir were taken out of the project design.

The other three components were to be implemented in two stages: first the "Upper Works" including the Boro 'improvement' and the Maun reservoir; then the "Lower Works" with the Sukwane dam and the pipeline to Orapa. The cabinet approved implementation of the first stage in late 1988. Following further detailed design work (e.g. SMEC 1990) and the award of tenders, the successful contractor began to mobilise equipment in Maun in late 1990.

### 1.3 The Relationship of the SOIWD Controversy to Environmental Issues

Most of the important environmental issues in Botswana can be considered under the heading of land degradation and sustainable resource management. This is in the context of low or irregular rainfall: Botswana is all arid or semi-arid. There is considerable scientific and political debate about these issues. It is important to understand their main features and to place them with respect to typical ways of conceptualising environmental issues such as weighing the economic benefits of development against the costs of environmental impact or analysis in terms of risk and the precautionary principle.

Sustainable resource management needs to be considered alongside land degradation because poor resource management is often seen as the main cause of degradation and ways of achieving sustainability as a major part of any solution. Land degradation in Botswana is described as "... the inevitable result of the misuse of the land and vegetation resources by overgrazing and the adoption of inappropriate agricultural practices. It consists of a number of interlinked processes, including a reduction in soil fertility, erosion of the soil, depletion of the vegetation biomass and ... [the] end product is desertification, a situation in which widespread disappearance of vegetation cover occurs, with commensurate difficulty in vegetation rehabilitation" (Moyo et al, 1993, pp.40-41).

Over the years there has been a recurring fear expressed among conservationists that the Okavango might be opened up for cattle. Since the lush vegetation of the Okavango, dependent on plentiful water and seasonal flooding, is laid over Kalahari sands, it is argued that even minor incursions of cattle would soon damage the environment irrecoverably.
Until fairly recently there has been no question of cattle in the Okavango because the area was infested with tsetse fly. However, since the mid 1970s eradication measures financed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other donors have allowed new areas of cattle range to be opened, notably a 4500 square km area to the north-east of the Okavango Delta, now divided from it by the Northern Buffalo Fence which was constructed in 1992. At the time of the campaign against the SOIWDP there was also a campaign against the Northern Buffalo Fence. Although the stated aim of this fence was to protect wildlife and the Okavango Delta from the incursion of cattle, conservationists claimed that the loss of this area so close to the Okavango would seriously disrupt wildlife migration and divide the Okavango from other important wildlife areas in north-eastern Botswana as well as Namibia and Zimbabwe, creating a series of large zoos where there used to be a continuous wildlife range. Some also argue that there is a long-term desire on the part of the cattle industry to utilise the delta: "for years the cattle industry has looked with envy at the lush swamps and flood-plains of the Okavango Delta" (Lomba 1992, p.7); and that even minor incursions into the delta such as that proposed along the Boro would destroy the 'integrity' of the Delta and could be the "thin end of the wedge" in this respect.

Leaving aside such speculative arguments for the moment (although we will come back to them), disputes about large-scale water engineering projects like the SOIWDP in arid regions relate to issues of land degradation and sustainable resource management in two main ways.

First, water is a basic natural resource which is in short supply in areas like the Kalahari. Hence there will always be competing demands and alternative proposals for how to utilise the existing water resources in order to promote development. In particular there will tend to be conflict between proposals to use water resources for national economic development and modernization (in this case, for diamond mining, irrigation and a modern, piped water supply to growing towns such as Maun) and proposals for more local community-based forms of development that may be easier to reconcile with conservationist ideas such as maintaining biodiversity and protecting endangered species. The IUCN report, discussed further below, proposed an alternative on these lines, combining suggestions for meeting water needs with local small-scale works using groundwater and surface water and proposals for strengthening household production in low-income communities via the sustainable use of water-related natural resources such as fish, thatching grass, reeds and wildlife (IUCN 1992a & b).

However, in terms of resource conflicts, it should also be noted that there is a potential conflict between the proponents of sustainable resource utilisation and more strict conservationists, whose beliefs in the overriding importance of preserving endangered species and the integrity of unique ecological habitats such as the Okavango Delta have been labelled "wilderness preservationism" (Van de Laar 1996). Such people can be seen as part of the
"deep ecology" paradigm within the environmentalist movement, which Colby (1990) contrasts both with "resource management" and with "eco-development". In this particular case the various sets of environmentalist interests tend to be aligned, and indeed local people who rely on the delta for subsistence are often reported as referring to it as a "complex living system that no-one understands" (Greenpeace 1991, p.14) and to engineering works such as that in the 1970s as causing the "death" of rivers. However, as Botswana in general continues to urbanise and modernise, this alignment of interests may not remain so strong in the future.

Second, land degradation could be hastened or reversed depending on how resources such as water are managed. Typically, both the proponents and the opponents of a scheme like the SOIWDP will cite the avoidance of land degradation as one the aims of their particular approach and suggested solution. In this case, proponents argued that evapo-transpiration rates are so high in the Okavango that careful water management would enable water to be taken off for irrigation (thus improving a large additional area of arid land) as well as for domestic purposes and mining, while hardly disturbing the essential nature of the Delta ecosystem. They pointed out that if part of the water was stored in reservoirs with greater depth than the natural swamps the total surface area would be less and hence evaporation if anything would be reduced overall (Porter 1989, p.6). Against this is the point that water would be removed from the delta itself relatively more quickly so that the Boro floodplain would dry out to a large extent and could become degraded, even if water was then conserved better outside the delta. Opponents also argued that the whole of the Northern Wildlife Area, of which the delta is only part, should be considered together (Williamson 1994, p.12), that other large-scale agricultural development projects had failed in the recent past, that the SOIWDP could have a negative impact on areas to the south of the delta proper if it encouraged over-production of cattle or agricultural products relative to the carrying capacity of the land, and that if it were extended it would have a devastating impact on the whole region leading to its overall degradation as an ecosystem. They argued that water needs for irrigation and other local purposes would be better met through a combination of smaller, less intrusive water conservation and extraction measures.

The traditional approach to decision making on development projects contested on environmental grounds is to compare expected benefits with environmental costs, the latter to be estimated via an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). An EIA was prepared by the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation at the same time as their feasibility study (SMEC 1987b). SMEC had been given both tasks by the Botswana government on the grounds that this made it easier to build the findings of the EIA into the project design. It was estimated that the main negative impact would occur on the Boro river and its floodplain. The lowest 12 km of the Boro had already been dredged during the same 1970s works mentioned above, allowing some estimation to be made of the likely impact of further dredging on the ecology
and tourism and fisheries potential of the river. This project would 'improve' a further 30 km including 25 km within the delta's protected area.

The EIA estimated that the proposed dredging and bunding would tend to dry out about 70 square km of floodplain, or less than 1% of the total area of the delta, with negative consequences on animal and bird wildlife including the endangered wattled crane for which the Okavango, particularly the sedgeland areas typical of the lower Boro, provide one of the few remaining breeding areas. The dredged section of the river itself would be likely to become a relatively sterile habitat so that the wilderness value of one of the main tourist boat routes into the delta would be much reduced and there would be considerable negative impact on fisheries important for local subsistence fishing communities. Some possible mitigating actions were suggested but they would be expensive and not necessarily effective. It was primarily the fact that the impact would be limited to a small part of the total area that led it to be judged acceptable. Benefits, mainly economic but including some ecological benefits in other parts of the project such as the possible increased water outflow to Lake Ngami, were regarded as outweighing this relatively small environmental cost.

However, in a government-sponsored review of the environmental impact studies Skinner (1989) suggested that the area of floodplain likely to be affected was 275 square km rather than only 70 square km and also concluded that a principal concern should be that the project might "act as a gate opener to future incursions into the delta" (Skinner 1989, pp.12,19). Subsistence economic activities currently carried out on the lower Boro could be displaced because of the negative effects of the project on carrying capacity and productivity, so that at least a further area equal to that mentioned above could be affected, making a total affected area of perhaps 3.5% of the delta. Even more seriously, demand for water might not be satisfied by the project (either because it became greater than anticipated or because the project failed to produce the increased water flow forecast for it) so that there would be pressure to continue the river 'improvements' up into the heart of the delta.

Weighing benefits against costs clearly presupposes a high degree of accuracy in the estimates of both the positive and negative impacts of a proposed project. Increasingly however, scientific evidence in cases like that of the SOIWDP is being questioned and it is suggested that such proposals should be analysed in terms of risk and uncertainty. Building dams and dredging rivers does not involve inestimable risks to humanity in the same way as, say, the transport of nuclear materials or global warming. However, many critics of the SOIWDP have indeed claimed that both benefits and costs are marked by extreme uncertainty.

On the one hand it is argued that the damage to the integrity of what is a unique ecosystem is essentially unknowable in advance. On the other hand it is claimed that it cannot be known for certain that the project will succeed in delivering the extra water it is supposed to supply.
There are two kinds of arguments here. First, local people point out that the Okavango consists of shallow water and swamp land spread over a wide area on top of Kalahari sands. They argue that the water of rivers such as the Boro would seep away into the sands if it were not for the hard surface of the bottom of the rivers. Dredging the Boro would break up this hard surface, causing not only seepage but siltation with sands from beneath swept along in the river, eventually building up to dam and divert it in an unpredictable way, or requiring further dredging on a regular basis. They cite the example of the dredging in the 1970s, which it is claimed led to siltation, dried up certain areas and did not result in a greater or more reliable outflow as planned.

The other cause for uncertainty is that the whole delta ecosystem is inherently unstable and its hydrology not well known. The overall gradient of the delta is very low at only 1:3300, giving rise to the phenomenon of hundreds of interconnecting channels whose relative importance changes markedly from year to year: "an extremely complex system of flow that is subject to changes in route and even direction" (Greenpeace 1991, p.1). It also crosses geological faultlines subject to occasional seismic tremors, which adds to the uncertainty. Thus Peter Smith (1989), an ecologist within the Department of Water Affairs, in a detailed critique written as an internal memorandum, argued: first, that the Boro river had not historically always been the main outflow from the delta (see also Wilson 1973) and hence might not necessarily continue to be so; second, that the bunding proposed to prevent the Boro waters from flooding and hence channel more water out of the delta might be unnecessary because in the low years when extra water would be needed there was little flooding in the Boro floodplain in any case; and, third, that the estimates of flows used in calibrations of the consultants' model against historical records differed from the actual recorded flows by amounts of the same order as the estimated increased outflow to be gained from the dredging, so that it was quite within the boundaries of error that there would be no increased flow at all. Clift-Hill (1991) also challenged the hydrological assumptions behind the consultants' model, arguing that water availability without the scheme was generally greater than the conservative estimates generated by the model suggested, so there was no immediate need for the scheme and hence there was time to assess its implications more fully.

Perhaps most telling is the exchange of views between Smith and SMEC's hydrological consultant, J.W.Porter, on the correct response to uncertainty. Porter comments on his method in a way that epitomises the scientific approach which assumes that one must always try to reach the most accurate conclusion with the data available:

"It is usual practice in science and technology, if we are either unable to understand or unable to define the complexity of a system, to make assumptions, postulate theories, and simplify the system. One could almost say
this is the basis of science, provided it makes use of the data available. For indeed, some degree of simplification is always necessary."

(Porter 1990, p.6)

Smith, on the other hand, argues that there was no demonstration of the need for the project but that nevertheless "much of the data used ... assumes implementation of the scheme" (1989, p.17). His conclusion that nothing should be done before an independent reassessment of the project is in line with the approach to uncertainty termed the "precautionary principle", under which "potentially harmful activities [should] only be undertaken if it can be convincingly demonstrated that they are not going to be harmful to the environment" (Kamminga 1995, p.127), and, one might add, only if it can be convincingly demonstrated that the potential benefits will in fact be achieved.

2 A More Complex Version of Events

2.1 'Consultations'

Peter Smith was later described by one of the Greenpeace study team as the 'whistle-blower' on the grounds that his internal memorandum was the first time questions were raised about the SOIWDP. This is probably not strictly correct as the Kalahari Conservation Society (KCS) had already been expressing concern over the proposed Boro dredging in various meetings with government for some time. The conservationist lobby, including particularly the Okavango Wild Life Society (OWLS) based in South Africa, as well as Rick Lomba and others, were of course known to be opposed to any developments in the Okavango, but details of the proposed scheme were not public until about 1987, so their opposition was not specifically directed against the SOIWDP as such.

KCS is the longest-established environmentalist NGO in Botswana and the only large national conservationist organization. Louis Nchindo, Head of Debswana, which runs the Orapa diamond mine, has also been Chair of KCS since its inception in the 1970s. Debswana is a joint venture between the Botswana government and De Beers, the South African diamonds giant, which in turn is a minority controlled subsidiary of the Anglo-American Corporation. The 'independence and impartiality' of KCS has been called into question by more radical conservationists such as Lomba and Williamson:

"[KCS] has always been closely associated with De Beers and its name, policies and activities conform remarkably well to advice given in a Report on Developing Tourism Revenue in Botswana. A few excerpts ... illustrate the grounds for suspicion: 'It is with this background of marketing psychology in
mind that it is proposed that the Kalahari Conservation Club should be formed by the Government of Botswana to make use of the famous name of the Kalahari in order to establish Botswana as a high cost status symbol destination for international tourists ... The Kalahari Club would, therefore, be fully and directly under the control of the Government of Botswana.' It is perhaps revealing that at KCS's inaugural meeting ... the first name to be put forward by the chairman was indeed the 'Kalahari Conservation Club'."

(Williamson 1994, p.24)

Despite such criticisms KCS has a record of promoting conservationist ideals and is equally criticised from the other side for being led by white expatriates with conservationist interests that may not chime with the development needs of the country. It has always supported wildlife protection and lobbied for the anti-poaching legislation when that was first brought in.

KCS states its general position in the introduction to a 1991 review of its input into the Okavango Water Development debate:

"It is not generally realized how much pressure KCS has brought to bear on Government over the last two years, nor the open and frank way that Government, particularly the Department of Water Affairs, has taken note and responded.

[T]he Society believes in sound management and sustainable utilization of natural resources: conservation in its view is different from mere preservation since it can often bring about benefits to local communities. Also KCS policy is to provide advice and assistance to Government in the form of consultants or technical staff rather than merely criticise Government's handling of issues. By nature of its position in Botswana, KCS has decided not to adopt the more radical stance of external pressure groups such as Greenpeace since it would quickly lose credibility with Government and be much less effective."

(KCS 1991, p.4)

In the late 1970s, Eleanor Pattison, the Chief Executive Officer of KCS, was made a non-voting member of the government's Water Development Committee. This made it easy for KCS to put its views across and for the government to claim it had consulted conservationists. KCS's concern over the SOIWDP culminated in 1988 in their writing to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Water Affairs to raise issues such as the possible alternative of a pipeline or canal from the delta's 'panhandle', which led to a series of meetings and correspondence over two years. In May 1990 KCS and others were
invited to a meeting to discuss their objections with the Department of Water Affairs and the consultants (KCS 1991, p.6). KCS had been reassured by the EIA and received further assurances that there would be no additional incursions into the delta. However, they had doubts similar to those of Peter Smith about whether the scheme would actually work from a hydrological point of view and were concerned about "possible international repercussions". KCS offered to commission independent consultants to reassess the project.

Botswana has been highly successful since independence in developing its economy and using the benefits of development if not to reduce inequality then at least to ameliorate the worst rural poverty. This success is probably due largely to the combination of technocratic planning and limited consultation which characterises Botswana's "paternalistic developmentalism" (Charlton, 1991, p.276). The nature of Botswana's developmentalist state and the extent to which its reputation for democracy is justified is discussed further below.

In the case of the delta, the Department of Water Affairs followed accepted practice for an engineering development in working out technical details and deciding between options within the department and through using an engineering consultancy firm. Once the general shape of the scheme and its components was decided, the department engaged in the standard process of local consultation. There was a series of small kgotla meetings in communities likely to be affected by the scheme. The kgotla is traditionally the local chief's court and the chief can call such a meeting to discuss any matter of general importance in the community. However, recently most kgotla meetings are called by chiefs at the request of government officials in order for the latter to explain policies which have already been decided. Although this is officially part of a consultation process it is very unusual for dissenting voices to be heard.

Notes made in this particular series of kgotla meetings by a District Officer, Lejo van der Heiden, show that there was some general dissatisfaction expressed, although it was rather muted. There may have been a belief that it was not possible to do anything to prevent the government from carrying out its plans to 'improve' the rivers. One should also note that the term 'river improvement' was used consistently in these consultations, giving the impression of rather limited works such as clearing the weeds which tend to build up and block channels. The idea of 'dredging' was not mentioned, so that local people probably did not expect such a large-scale, intrusive project as the one which was planned.

These low-key local consulations occurred in parallel with the equally low-key national consultations with KCS and others mentioned above. The detailed design, estimating and tendering process was also going on at the same time. However, no public announcement had been made about the SOIWDP since cabinet approval in late 1988 so the Maun community was taken by surprise by the arrival of contracting engineers from the South African company LTA in early November 1990.
2.2 How the Project became 'Suspended'

Events then moved very fast. The quickest to react were white residents, members of what the then director of the DWA, Moremi Sekwale, called the "Duck Inn community" after the meeting place in Maun favoured by tour operators and conservationists. Their efforts led to local and international opposition to the SOIWDP building up in parallel.

Several of these people, led by Paul Sheller, were members of the Maun branch of KCS and wanted to represent their membership and raise questions about the imminent engineering works. Sheller had already written to Eleanor Pattison in October expressing 'dismay' at the attitude of KCS nationally over the SOIWDP. It became clear that KCS was not prepared to take up the issue officially and so when an open public meeting was called for 30 November 1990 at the Duck Inn it was not sponsored by KCS. The meeting was minuted by Karen Ross, then the voluntary secretary of the Maun branch of KCS and a well-known local ecologist who had previously researched a BBC film and book on the Okavango (Ross 1987). A headcount of 120 people was recorded, including a large number of local Batawana chiefs and tribespeople.

It was explained at the meeting that the Boro river would be deepened by 1m and the banks raised by 0.7m. The channel to be dredged was to be 40m wide with roads and earthen walls to be constructed on either side, the work area to extend 20-25m either side of the channel and all trees to be cleared from the area, the last point apparently being contrary to SMEC's specifications. Questions were asked on why the Okavango had not been declared a World Heritage Site, on the ETA, on the loss of floodplains which are of known importance as breeding sites for rare bird species, on the risk that the dredged channel would create a "sucking down effect" so that much more of the delta became relatively drier than just the immediate Boro floodplain, on the lack of interim provision for those who depended directly on Boro water while the works were in progress, on the danger of seepage once the river bed was damaged, on health hazards from standing water in reservoirs and possible pollution, on the negative effect on tourism of a man-made construction in a supposed wilderness area, on the possible overall lowering of the water table, and on the probable loss of fisheries and possible extinction of certain fish species. Finally the fear was expressed that not enough was known about the effects of dredging in part of what was an integrated "living system" and that the whole delta could be destroyed through drying out in a way that had been seen in small areas where dredging had been carried out in the past.

Although white conservationists had taken the lead in calling the meeting, the leading lights to come from the meeting were Batawana. It was noted that, although not many people had attended the previous kgotla meeting on the project held in Maun, there had been objections. It was agreed that it was important to go through the correct channels and contact the District
Commissioner, the local tribal administration and the relevant central government departments to ask for another kgotla meeting to be held, this time on a Saturday when more people could attend. It was recognised that in order for local opposition to the dredging to prevail it would have to be clearly demonstrated that the opposition was widespread and not confined to an educated few including whites with a special interest in conservation and tourism. Hence it was important to consult those in communities living on the Boro, and try to get as many of them as possible to attend the meeting. As was said from the floor: "Those people probably did not know the importance of walking from the village to the kgotla, so we must walk to them." At the end of the meeting an informal steering committee of notable local Batawana was formed, consisting of ex-Independent MP Moutsamai Mpho, Frank Ramsden, Isaac Tudor, John Ben and Willy Philips, the last two being professional hunters. Although it was noted that no organization was being set up and everyone would attend the kgotla as individuals, this group undertook to contact the various authorities on behalf of the Maun community as agreed.

The position of KCS in relation to the activism in Maun against the SOIWD is unclear. According to Karen Ross, KCS in Gaborone made it clear to the Maun branch that there had been a central decision to drop the issue. At the 30 November meeting one of the KCS members present said that the local branch had been "told by the parent body to lay off", and had received a phone call from Gaborone telling them that "the President's office had taken note, this was a warning not a threat", but pointing out that most of the KCS committee were expatriates and hence potentially subject to deportation. Another white conservationist resident of Maun was reported in the Johannesburg Sunday Times of 2 December 1990 as claiming the KCS had "been ordered by the government to keep its nose out of the issue". However, the official KCS position is that they never issued a directive for the Maun branch to cease campaigning, but simply told them they should be careful not to use an approach which would counteract what the central organization was doing at the political level in Gaborone. KCS tends not to favour publicity being given to disagreements between it and government, believing that it retains more credibility if it lobbies away from the media spotlight. In fact at this particular time KCS as a national organization had at least temporarily stopped lobbying on the issue, and issued a statement the same week as the meeting, supporting the idea of providing an adequate and secure water supply for Maun and for Orapa.

"Now that the contract for the project has been awarded, KCS feels any further lobbying can have no practical purpose and that the best course of action is to continue to observe how the project develops."

(quoted in Johannesburg Sunday Times, December 2, 1990)
Contacts had already been made with individuals and environmentalist NGOs in South Africa, USA, UK and elsewhere in an attempt to gather international support for a campaign against the SOIWDP. Several South African newspapers ran stories in which the Maun residents were described as "furious" or even that "Maun based nature lovers this week threatened to sabotage construction" (Johannesburg Saturday Star, December 8, 1990). The Batawana steering group felt obliged, having immediately gone to the District Commissioner with the request for a kgotla meeting, to point out when writing to the Minister of Water Affairs on 7 December 1990 that "we are not a fighting group" and "we regret that the tone of the press is rather harsh".

Two other supposed developments were reported in South African newspapers in the first week of December. First was the suggestion that Greenpeace International was "considering launching an international campaign called 'Diamonds are for Death' to save the swamps" (Johannesburg Sunday Times, December 2, 1990; reported in similar words in the Saturday Star, December 8, 1990 and the Sun, December 11, 1990). Both the Sun and the Sunday Times quoted Greenpeace International campaigns director Steve McAllister in Amsterdam as saying "It's appalling - to say the least!" The Saturday Star referred to the issue as "an international controversy", while both the Sunday Times and the Sun also quoted Allan Thornton of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), an NGO based in London, as saying "We fully support the protest groups inside and outside Botswana and are concerned about De Beers' involvement with the project".

The other development was the reported denial by De Beers of any involvement in the project. A spokesman for the company pointed out that "the initial stage is designed to regulate and provide water for Maun" (Johannesburg Sunday Times, December 2, 1990) and that the second stage of the SOIWDP which would bring water to Orapa had not yet been approved. Debswana was also reported to have spent considerable effort locating new groundwater reserves near enough to Orapa to service the mine's needs for the foreseeable future.

At first another kgotla meeting was expected on 15 December, although in the end it did not take place until 11 January 1991. However, in preparation for the earlier date a second public meeting was held at the Duck Inn on 12 December 1990. Some of the same points came up as before, but now it appeared as though De Beers had "pulled out" and there was not even an argument that water was required for reasons of national development. Now that effectively the only reason for dredging was water for Maun, the Maun residents felt that the fact that "the meeting here is totally against dredging" should be reason enough for the government at least to hold on until there could be an independent investigation. One contribution from the floor summed up a lot of the feeling:
"I speak as a tribesman. You know we had a dredging scheme that failed. ... I saw the terrible effects. ... Dredging is destructive to the environment, and there is still no guarantee that you can drink the water. ... It is like saying you killed a snake by hitting it on the tail. Government can get water in some other way.... Dredging is the last thing. Dredging is something we don't want."

(Questions asked at a Public Meeting held at the Duck Inn on Wednesday 12th December 1990, mimeo)

Press reports continued over the Christmas and New Year period, some linking the Boro dredging plan with the construction of the Northern Buffalo Fence, on which construction work started during this period. A report in the Durban Sunday Tribune, January 6, 1991, suggested that opening up the area to the north-east of the delta to cattle and dredging the Boro river to help in producing diamonds together constituted "plans to develop the Okavango swamps, one of the world's last wildernesses". There was now reported to be a threatened boycott of Botswana's beef exports to Europe as well as a threatened diamonds boycott. The Johannesburg Weekly Mail, January 11-17, 1991, under the headline "Beef Barons threaten the Okavango", also reported that the "famed Okavango swamps are under a twin threat from dredging of the area and encroachment by cattle". In response, the chairman of the Botswana Meat Commission was quoted as saying that "the government should promote cattle ranching instead of maintaining the country as 'a gigantic zoo' for the benefit of tourists and international conservationists".

By this time it was being reported that Greenpeace was about to send a team of investigators to the area to investigate both the SOIWDP and the Northern Buffalo Fence. Greenpeace International in Amsterdam was first alerted to the SOIWDP as a possible 'threat' to the Okavango in a fax from Rick Lomba in South Africa on 9 November 1990. Greenpeace also received similar communications from EarthLife Africa in Durban as well as directly from Botswana. Clearly, as soon as he heard what was happening in Maun, Lomba sent messages asking for support in a campaign to a large number of international organizations, including MONITOR, an alliance of US conservationist and environmental NGOs, Greenpeace and others. By 7 December, Greenpeace had written to the Botswana Government and to De Beers. The latter issued a press statement on that day saying they had no direct involvement, and also replied to Greenpeace in the same vein, while the former replied inviting Greenpeace to "come and find out".

Alison Ross, one of the three-person team which later visited from Greenpeace, is clear that the idea of a "Diamonds are for Death" campaign was never a Greenpeace proposition. As a slogan it clearly came from Rick Lomba, who used it as a heading for his faxes and suggested to Steve McAllister that it would make a good campaign. McAllister may have taken it up as
a reply heading and certainly used it at least once in an internal memo. However, Greenpeace never made any commitment internally or externally to an ongoing campaign, and there is no evidence that it had the capacity at that time to promote a boycott successfully. The suggestion that Greenpeace might campaign on this slogan was probably put to sympathetic South African journalists by Lomba or other conservationists and McAllister did nothing to dispel the idea by his reported response ("It's appalling - to say the least!") - see above) to whichever journalist spoke to him early in December. Lomba also apparently suggested that "Diamonds are for Death" could be very damaging when he met with De Beers managers on 8 December.

Although it was not in the end held on a Saturday, the kgotla meeting on 11 January 1991 was attended by between 500 and 100 people and lasted for over six hours. The resolve at the previous public meeting to "walk to" the communities had been carried out. Frank Ramsden and the others had achieved a high degree of mobilisation. They had persuaded businessmen to lend trucks and by various means had fetched people from the whole district to the meeting. Some had come from as far away as Shakawe on the western fringe of the delta, a distance of 370 km. Most of those present were traditional leaders and representatives of communities in and around the delta.

Archie Mogwe, the Minister of Mineral Resources and Water Affairs, was harangued by at least 20 speakers, none of whom supported the government's scheme. Mr. Mogwe appears to have been caught by surprise by the strength of feeling, perhaps having been led to believe by his department officials that the previous consultations had been quite positive and hence expecting at least some support from the Town Council or traditional leaders. One report even suggests that Mr. Mogwe had not understood that 'river improvement' actually meant dredging inside the protected area of the delta. In the event even the local MP from his own ruling Botswana Democratic Party, Bahite Temane, spoke against the project, and accused the government of not having told local people about the dredging but only about the proposed dams outside the delta area. Other speakers appealed to the idea of democracy:

"The huge turnout of locals gave the lie to suggestions by proponents of the scheme that opposition to it was being organised purely by a band of expatriate whites for their own ends. ... Accusing the government of arrogance, ... ex-game ranger John Ben said Botswana was a democratic country and Minister Mogwe must understand that 'the Kgotla rules - he must come and speak to us here, and answer us here'."

(Johannesburg Saturday Star, January 12 1991)
Although he did not say so at the meeting, immediately afterwards the Minister announced that the SOIWDP was suspended "pending further consultation", while restating that "Government remains satisfied that this project offers the best long-term solution to the water shortage in Maun ... and other settlements along the Boteti and Nhabe rivers". The suggestion that there would be no serious environmental impact was reiterated and the potential benefit to birdlife around Lake Ngami was mentioned. The reason given for the suspension was that it had become clear at the kgotla meeting that "certain members of the community still had reservations about the project". In retrospect Moremi Sekwale now says that the scheme was shelved as a response to threats from Greenpeace. However, at the time the government press release did not mention international opinion, Greenpeace or its forthcoming visit.

2.3 How the Project became 'Terminated'

The Greenpeace visit took place from 29 January 29 to 12 February 1991. It included investigation of the Northern Buffalo Fence as well as the SOIWDP. The team eventually comprised Allan Thornton of EIA, who was also a Greenpeace board member, Alison Ross, a wildlife campaigner with Greenpeace UK, and Tony Marriner, Head of Greenpeace Communications.

The first two days were spent on introductory meetings with ministries in Gaborone. At one point Rick Lomba accompanied them and it was planned he would join the study tour as a representative of MONITOR. However, he was ejected from one meeting apparently because he insisted on talking about the issue of land rights for the Basarwa people, certainly not part of what the government had invited Greenpeace to look at, and thereafter played only a background role. Then the team flew to Maun and met members of what by now was calling itself the Tshomorelo Okavango Conservation Trust (TOCT), but which the Greenpeace report refers to simply as OCT. These were some of the white Maun conservationists and the local Batawana leaders mentioned above. (When TOCT became a fully-fledged independent NGO is not clear. It was not until a few months later that most of the KCS Maun members finally split from KCS.)

TOCT members had arranged a hectic itinerary which included meetings with local tribespeople and visits to relevant sites in and around the delta. The government may have been surprised by the speed with which this itinerary had been arranged and the fact that it was done independently. According to Alison Ross, on 2 February police and officials turned up at a bush camp where they were staying and from then on there were officially arranged trips and meetings, including one meeting in Maun for which several representatives of SMEC and others were flown in and a trip to Orapa hosted by Debswana. There was also a boat trip up the Boro to see the site of the proposed works (and, incidentally, the site of the previous
dredging in the 1970s), on which Peter Smith arranged to be the guide from the Department of Water Affairs.

On the last day of the Greenpeace visit a joint press communiqué was issued by the Botswana Government and Greenpeace International on the SOIWD. It stated that Greenpeace had "appealed to the Government of Botswana to establish the Okavango Delta Ecosystem as World Heritage Site" and also sought an assurance that plans to dredge the Boro River would be abandoned. In the same communiqué Minister Mogwe said that Botswana was considering the issue of the Okavango being declared a World Heritage Site and the possibility of joining the Ramsar convention, and confirmed the suspension of the SOIWD. However, he stated:

"The Botswana government will not dredge for the sake of dredging, but ... does have to keep the dredging option open, if in the end it is the only option through which Government can meet its obligation to provide water to Maun and communities down the river."

(Joint Communiqué issued by Botswana Government and Greenpeace International on the SOIWD, February 12, 1991)

Given this rather equivocal agreement from the government, Greenpeace wrote to the President of Botswana, Quett Masire, on 1 March, urging that the dredging be abandoned and the integrity of the delta ecosystem be protected through nomination under the Ramsar and World Heritage conventions, and that an independent review be commissioned on ways of meeting water needs in the area which would include an assessment of the non-dredging aspects of the SOIWD. Greenpeace published their report on the visit (Greenpeace 1991) in April, circulating it widely to international NGOs, the press and interested politicians and accompanying the publication with a press release. They did some limited follow up (more on the buffalo fence than the SOIWD), for example getting a question asked in the UK House of Commons on how the environmental implications of the use of British aid money was assessed. (The SOIWD was said to be the brainchild of Stewart Child, Senior Hydrological Advisor in Botswana's Department of Water Affairs, a post funded by the British Overseas Development Administration.) However, Greenpeace did not initiate a full international campaign on the issue.

The Botswana government, meanwhile, had decided to commission an independent review of the SOIWD as a whole, not ruling out any options. It did not take up the offer from KCS or turn to the University of Botswana but asked an international agency, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), to carry out the review. IUCN arranged for its team to be headed by Ted Scudder, an anthropologist from CalTech who had been studying the impact of water development projects on people since 1956. Scudder assembled a team of 13 from four
countries, constrained both by the IUCN policy of not recruiting its own personnel for such studies and by the Botswana government stipulation not to include team members who had recently worked in Botswana. They included hydrologists, biologists, engineers and social scientists, began work in October 1991 and completed a Draft Final Report in May 1992 (IUCN 1992a).

Initially the Scudder team were divided in their opinions of the SOIWDP. However, "[a]s the review continued ... more and more project defects began to appear" (Scudder 1993, p.20), so that eventually the recommendation in the Draft Final Report to terminate the project was unanimous. Although certain aspects of the work were not complete, in particular the hydrological modelling and the study of international aspects of river basin management, it was felt that the weight of argument was already sufficient for a clear recommendation. These arguments included insufficient attention having been given to alternatives, "over design" of the Maun reservoir particularly once the irrigation component was scaled down, inadequate analysis of some of the impacts on the natural resource base, institutional weaknesses and the strength of local political opposition. However, perhaps the most important reason was that the SOIWDP had originally been justified on humanitarian rather than economic grounds but would no longer meet its original goals:

"Analysis by the IUCN review team leads to the conclusion ... that the low income majority ... would, on balance, be worse off if the proposed scheme had gone ahead ... Numerous examples of overestimation of benefits and underestimation of costs further weaken[s] ... a project which is no longer justified on humanitarian grounds and which, as currently conceived, is more for the benefit of Maun and Orapa than for the rural majority."

(IUCN 1992a, pp.1-4)

The IUCN Draft Final Report also contained a 46-page section analysing a "preferred alternative" which would meet the original goals of the SOIWDP at lower cost and more sustainably (Scudder 1993, p.21). It suggests that Maun's water needs could be met indefinitely from the joint use of groundwater and surface water, plus a water treatment plant, and agreed with Debswana's managers that the Orapa diamond mine could continue to get enough water from groundwater sources. It then concentrated on meeting the goal of raising the living standards of the low-income majority by means of a range of small-scale measures. There is a wide range or recommendations for improving the household economy of the various riverine communities. These include building on the potential offered by water-related natural resources such as thatching grass, reeds, fish and wildlife, and integrating the village sector into the development of Maun and into the tourism industry.
On the same day that the IUCN draft report was released (May 21, 1992), the Government of Botswana announced in a radio broadcast that the SOIWDP was "terminated". However, it was made clear that the cancellation was not because of the technical critique in the IUCN report, but because of the extent of local opposition. In fact the Director of Water Affairs, Moremi Sekwale, later made it clear to Scudder that had the review been undertaken on the basis of a contract direct with the government then it would not have been accepted and public release would not have been allowed (Scudder 1993, p.20).

2.4 The Position up to 1996

We have seen that there were two clear and apparently forced policy changes on the part of the Botswana Government and its Department of Water Affairs: first, to halt work on the project while an independent study was commissioned from the IUCN; then, to "terminate" the project even before responding to the report of the independent study team.

This leaves a number of unresolved issues, in two main areas. First, at the local level, how are the ever-increasing requirements for water in Maun and its surrounding communities to be met? The IUCN report made various alternative suggestions for water supply as well as for improving livelihoods, but these were not specifically taken up. Nevertheless, since 1992 a number of smaller improvements to water supply arrangements have been made, including increased utilisation of groundwater and a new water treatment plant, both of which were recommendations of the IUCN report.

Second, at the national level, while dropping the SOIWDP the Government has on several occasions made it clear that it considers the waters of the Okavango to be a national resource which could at some more appropriate time be developed as part of the modernization of the country. The government has refused to become a contracting party to the 1971 Ramsar Convention or the World Heritage Convention and hence to have the Okavango Delta included on the Ramsar "List of wetlands of international importance", despite the fact that this could give the country access to the Ramsar "Wetland Conservation Fund". The President has from time to time referred to the potential for development of the Okavango, including a notable occasion in March 1994 when on a state visit President Mugabe of Zimbabwe referred to the Áswan Dam and said that the Okavango should be used to develop irrigated agriculture "like the Nile in Egypt".

Ted Scudder has several times criticised the Botswana government for refusing to react officially to the IUCN report. In particular he has suggested since 1992 in articles in Botswana newspapers and elsewhere that the government may be deliberately "punishing" Maun and the local riparian communities by not implementing or even appraising his team's "preferred alternative" (see e.g. Scudder 1994). The implication is that the government may
be hoping that if water shortage reaches crisis dimensions there may be less opposition to a future water development project.

The position of the President himself may perhaps be inferred from this statement made in a press interview in July 1994, in response to a question about water shortage in Maun:

"I suppose this is where democracy conflicts with development. We could have built a dam here a couple of years ago and there would be water galore but mainly because those who have interests in the tourism industry, they thought it was going to spoil the environment or bring in lots of people here to whet the appetite of government to build even more dams. So there was Green Peace [sic], there was the local people, they incited the local tourist operators, they incited the people in the Kgotla and they all refused. So in a democratic set up, people must make their beds and lie on it."

(His Excellency Dr. Quett Masire, President of Botswana, interviewed in the Okavango Observer, 12-18 July, 1994)

3 Explanations for the Policy Change

As can be inferred from the different versions of events given above, there are several competing or perhaps complementary explanations for why the government first 'suspended' and then 'terminated' the SOIWDP. There are some special factors which would not apply outside Botswana, such as the role of the expatriate community with its special position in that country. However, there are four explanations of more general application. They relate to the democratic political context, to the complementary role of different NGOs, to the internationalisation of the issue, and to the relative lack of impact on major economic stakeholders. We now discuss each of these in turn.

3.1 The Political Context: Aspects of Democracy

Botswana is generally regarded as one of Africa's few successful multi-party democracies. It has been suggested that the policy change over the SOIWDP resulted from the democratic nature of modern Botswana. However, to describe Botswana as democratic is not straightforward and neither is the attribution of the policy change to the workings of democracy. We suggest, following the approach in Potter (1996), that democracy can be considered in terms of four aspects, viz: accountability through multi-party elections, civil and political rights, diversity of power centres, and political participation (Potter and Taylor 1996, p.5). Neither Botswana nor indeed any other country 'scores' equally well on all aspects.
To understand to what extent the policy change may have resulted from democratic pressures, we will first explore briefly the history of Botswana as an independent state to see which of the four aspects are most in evidence, and then assess how the way the decision occurred relates to these aspects.

The territory which became independent Botswana was declared a British protectorate largely as a means of containing the movement of Boer settlers northwards in the late nineteenth century. However, there were in the end relatively few settlers and, unlike in many other African colonies, most of the land (80% at independence) remained in the hands of local communities under traditional communal (or tribal) forms of tenure. Not surprisingly, given that most of Botswana is arid or semi-arid, this is mostly rangeland with what remains a low population density despite recent fast population growth.

Cattle ownership has been and remains significant as an indicator of wealth as well as in terms of productive contribution to the economy, though the significance varies between ethnic groups. However, although pastoralism is a traditional pursuit, cattle ownership is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small proportion of the population. Moyo, O'Keefe and Sill (1993, p.35) quote studies by Arntzen and Veenendaal (1986) and by Yeager (1989) to estimate that 45% of rural households in Botswana own no cattle and 60% of the cattle are owned by 5% of the population.

In 1966 Botswana became independent, and the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) took power, having won the election carried out under colonial supervision in 1965. The colonial system had been one of indirect rule in which the British colonialists used traditional chiefs and institutions such as the patron-client system of cattle-loanin known as mafisa to maintain a paternalistic kind of control. The majority of the population lived in rural areas in abject poverty. There had been little history of opposition to British "protection", and no political parties until 1959. The only radical element was a small group involved in South African nationalist politics, some of whom formed the Botswana People's Party (BPP) in 1960.

The BDP emerged in 1962 partly as a response to the militant BPP. It was an alliance of the traditional aristocracy of chiefs and "headmen" with the new educated and salaried class of civil servants, teachers, policemen, etc., regarded by Tsie (1993, p.36) as two fractions of a "cattle-based petty-bourgeoisie", since they were both able to accumulate large herds, invest in boreholes, increase control over grazing land on a de facto private basis, employ semi-wage labour, and generally "convert cattle from embodiments of use-value to embodiments of exchange-value".

Molutsi (1993, p.5) characterises the decolonisation process as "largely an act of benevolence on the part of the British government" and Botswana at the time as "a poverty stricken,
politically conservative society" with "an embryonic elite which was happy to peacefully acquire the leadership of the post-colonial state". A liberal democratic constitution was negotiated between members of this new elite and the colonial administration. Molutsi goes on to point out that "The country's institutions and democracy are imposed from above. Starting from the highest - parliament - down to the most grassroots, the village development committee (VDC), [they] were handed down to the population" (ibid, p.5).

With virtually no rural support, the BPP won only three of the 31 seats in the 1965 election, to the BDP's 28. The BDP won that election, and every election since, by combining the votes of the small but increasingly important urban-based professional elite with support from the rural peasantry based on both traditional and newer forms of patronage relations either with traditional chiefs and cattle-owners or with the newer absentee "cattle barons". The Botswana National Front (BNF), which has become the most important opposition party, is largely an urban-based labour party, and as such has won parliamentary seats and control of local councils in most of Botswana's towns but does not threaten the dominance of the BDP nationally. Thus both main parties are urban-based, and in fact leaders of both come from different elements of the same small elite sometimes known as the "class of '65". The interests of poor rural people are not really represented.

In the period since independence Botswana has enjoyed the highest average economic growth rate in Africa. Indeed, for the period 1965-1990, Botswana had the highest average annual growth of GNP per capita of any country in the world, at 8.4% (Leftwich 1994, p.397, quoting data mainly from the World Bank). During this period only eight countries experienced average growth of GNP per capita above 4% per annum; the other seven were all in East and South-east Asia. Botswana has followed a market-led development strategy, and its success is often cited as evidence for the superiority of such a strategy. In fact its economic growth has been based on the export of minerals, especially diamonds since their discovery at Orapa in 1967 and later at Jwaneng, but also salt/soda-ash, coal and copper-nickel. By the end of the 1980s Botswana was in the world's top three producers of diamonds, with about one-fifth of world output. In 1990 diamonds accounted for 80% of the country's export earnings, and minerals altogether for 88% of exports and 46% of GDP (Mzhone 1993, p.43). Despite the continuing importance of cattle, their exports account for only about 2% of export earnings, sold mostly to the European Union on specially favourable terms agreed under the Lomé Convention.

Botswana has maintained a healthy economy since independence, with the state itself emerging as the wealthiest institution in society, with direct revenues accruing to government from the mineral developments. However, economic growth has been accompanied not only by high population growth and urbanization (from a low base, so that the population is still mostly
rural) but by increases in inequality. According to the UNDP's *Human Development Report 1993*, 40% of the urban and 55% of the rural population lived in absolute poverty in 1990. However, although the mining-led economic growth has not improved the livelihoods of the rural poor, it has allowed the government to institute a fairly comprehensive and sustainable welfare programme, including free primary education, basic health care, provision of safe water, and drought relief and poverty alleviation measures. Drought relief in particular has been established as the single most important reason people give for supporting the BDP government (Molutsi 1989, p.128).

Botswana also has a reputation for open, democratic institutions. However, as already noted, these have almost all been imposed from above. There has been very little spontaneous development of NGOs or other institutions of civil society, and those which have begun to emerge have often been coopted or dominated by government, leaving civil society relatively weak (Molutsi and Holm 1990). The democratic facade hides the fact that the country has been ruled since independence by the same small elite, with senior civil servants and politicians interchanging positions in a manner very rare in western liberal democracies (see e.g. Charlton 1991). Having won all the elections since independence, by 1996 the BDP had enjoyed 30 years in power, which compared with 17 years for the Conservatives in the UK and 16 years for ZANU(PF) in Zimbabwe).

Let us now consider the four features of democracy put forward above. We expect these taken together to capture the complexity of political culture better than a scale measuring less or more 'democracy' or a simple notion of 'democratization' as a uni-dimensional process.

1 Accountability through multi-party elections

In Botswana there has been clear and public espousal of the ideals of multi-party democracy, though in practice it is a "de facto one party state through the ballot box" (Tsie 1993, p.36). The BDP has won the national elections by a landslide every five years, starting with the pre-independence elections of 1965. As noted above, Tsie describes the BDP as representing the "cattle-based petty bourgeoisie". He goes on to suggest that the BDP has built "a network of patron-client relations to sustain its legitimacy and support among the peasantry", some of whom still perceive the BDP as a liberator from the oppressive rule of certain traditional chiefs. A series of rural development programmes has "cushioned the poorer section of the peasantry from the full brunt of the process of primitive accumulation and the effects of drought" (*ibid*, p.36).

The main opposition party, BNF, is mainly an urban-based labour party. It has challenged the conduct of elections in two cases and been upheld in the High Court; it has also won several seats on different occasions including Gaborone North and South in 1984 and 1989 as well as
some local councils notably Jwaneng. It is certainly a credible opposition and there is no real
dispute that the elections have generally been "free and fair", though equally there is no real
prospect of a change of government through the ballot box.

2 Civil and political rights

Since independence Botswana has been in principle open and politically "free", though support
for the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the consequent constant threat of
retaliation by the white South African regime has led to some self-imposed restrictions on this
freedom. Up to 1989 at least it was claimed that "formal and informal censorship pressures
remain strong for reporting on the main opposition party, the BNF" (Zaffiro 1989, p.67).

The self-conscious adherence to liberal democratic ideals has meant that it has been possible to
mount effective campaigns against abuses of human rights or personal freedoms, even on
behalf of expatriate individuals. However, at a more general level, it is not clear how
meaningful this political "freedom" has been in terms of generating widespread discussion on
important national issues.

3 Diversity of power centres

In Botswana there is to some degree a classical separation of state from society. But
patronage remains an important way of maintaining support. However, although cattle
interests in particular are strongly linked to government, in general one can say that the state
and its leadership are relatively independent from the demands of special interests.

Both local councils and the judiciary appear to have a degree of independence and power in
their own spheres. Traditional leaders and structures such as the kgotla retain considerable
importance at the local level, and while perhaps detracting from the ease of independent action
of local councils this factor also contributes to internal plurality of power.

In other respects the strength and apparent democratic legitimacy of the Botswana state allow
it to dominate areas such as rural development and education where in other African countries
there is space for NGO activity. As noted above, there is a tendency for the government to
coopet independent initiatives or completely take them over. For example, the Botswana
Brigades has become a parastatal where in Zimbabwe the equivalent, the Zimbabwe
Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP), remains an NGO with independent
support from foreign donors and NGOs.

At the international level, Botswana is relatively independent of the international agencies and
donor community. The Botswana state is strong enough to treat with them on its own terms,
so that they do not represent such an important alternative source of power within the country
as in other African countries. However, foreign investors and companies, particularly those from South Africa, are very important and powerful in Botswana, especially within their own industrial sectors.

4 Political participation

Traditional forms of local participation persist in Botswana, while becoming of less importance as time goes on. The government in particular uses the local kgotla meetings to consult with or inform local communities about policies, and in principle they are also open to NGOs and others.

By contrast there is no strong popular political culture at national level. Independence was gained through negotiation between the ruling colonialists and the local national elite. Voluntarism is to some extent still seen as cutting across traditional commitment to community - though this attitude is changing with urbanisation and the spread of commercialism and wage economy.

Democracy in Botswana and the Termination of the SOIWDP

To summarise, despite its positive reputation Botswana is not a model democracy, though it does 'score' well in certain respects, particularly multi-party elections and plurality of internal power centres. In particular, the form of peaceful transition to independence meant the democratic institutions were all "handed down" and that there was no growth of popular political participation.

There was some reference to elections and the political party process during the campaign against the SOIWDP. One of the Batawana leaders of the opposition to the SOIWDP in Maun was Moutsamai Mpho, an ex-Independent MP, and there were reports of a possible electoral alliance between all the opposition parties, including the Independent Party, that might include environmental issues in its platform against the governing BDP (Johannesburg Weekly Mail, January 11-17, 1991). Indeed the government is generally very sensitive to any issue that could become a focus of opposition during an election campaign, either nationally or locally. However, on the whole the campaigners played down any question of electoral opposition and emphasised instead the unity of the local community against the project, with BDP MP Bahite Temane and other BDP members such as Frank Ramsden speaking alongside Mr. Mpho.

More important to the success of the campaign was the existence of alternative power centres. The “Duck Inn” community, comprising conservationist and tour operator interests, could not be entirely discounted given the importance of tourism to the economy. Much more important, however, was the opposition of the Maun Council, as well as that of the traditional
authorities such as the Chief of the Batawana. These all represented relatively independent power centres where opposing views to those of government could be articulated. Most particularly, the traditional institution of the kgotla, though more usually a vehicle for one-way communication from government to communities, was available and could be used to generate and demonstrate local opposition.

Although there was a high degree of popular participation during the campaign, this was clearly very unusual. One could not argue that the policy change arose because of the participative political culture, but rather that it occurred despite the normally closed nature of the policy process. What was normal was the low-key representation on government committees by the KCS and the equally low-key consultations with communities before the decision to go ahead with dredging was well known. These could hardly be termed full political participation and did not contribute to the policy change.

As for the question of civil and political rights, there was no open suppression of the campaign although there were hints of government pressure on KCS and veiled threats against expatriate campaigners. Peter Smith was apparently censured for his whistle-blowing and may have been given a less favourable than expected deal on retirement as a result. It is also interesting that, despite the supposed independence of the Botswana press, it was the South African press that made the running on the campaign.

Thus the aspect of democracy that contributed most to the success of the campaign was the presence of alternative power centres particularly at local level.

The government itself often claimed, as in the interview with President Masire quoted above, that the climb-down over the Okavango was proof of its democratic credentials. Perhaps the most telling comment on this question was the verdict of Peter Smith, who despite some indications that he may have been treated badly because of his opposition to the scheme nevertheless was basically positive about the government's role and gave it credit for backing down. "You wouldn't find any other African government doing this".

3.2 The Complementary Role of Different NGOs

The NGOs involved in the campaign against the SOIWDP were of several different types, including local, national and international NGOs. One explanation for the success of the campaign is that different NGOs may have carried out different roles in complementary but effective ways. Before trying to assess this idea let us briefly review the general role of NGOs in Botswana and the different types that exist historically.

The campaign was relatively unusual in Botswana where in general NGOs have little importance. Until quite recently there was no published directory, and a total of only 44
registered voluntary organizations was listed by Nteta (1988). Of these only three could be called national environmental organizations, namely the Forestry Association of Botswana (FAB), Kalahari Conservation Society (KCS) and Wildlife Clubs. Informal estimates put the number of NGOs at national or district level with some environmental interest at around fifteen to twenty in 1994, of which perhaps fewer than half-a-dozen were operating before about 1989. These estimates probably do not include international NGOs or very local groups. However, this is clearly a rather small level of activity.

There is some indication that at the local level the numbers are also relatively low - traditional forms of organization may predominate over voluntary group formation, which may be seen as "alien" (ibid, p.5), though this is a topic requiring careful study before any definite pronouncements can be made.

NGOs are of many types, and several writers have put forward typologies or suggested principles for distinguishing, say, grassroots organizations (GROs) from other NGOs (see e.g. Riddell 1990; Uphoff 1993). I have suggested elsewhere (Thomas 1992) that it is important to distinguish mutual benefit organizations, based on membership, from public benefit organizations, including charities and other NGOs set up to supply services to others as well as campaigning or research organizations which do not necessarily have a defined client group. It is also important to recognise differences in scope and scale; NGOs working variously at local, national and international levels cannot be expected to work in similar ways.

In Botswana, there are important differences between NGOs in terms of their cultural background and historical development as movements. In particular, Western-style conservationist NGOs, with activities including voluntary efforts in support of wildlife, must be distinguished from indigenous national and community-based NGOs.

Although few in number, the former type include some longstanding examples. Apart from the KCS one can cite the Forestry Association of Botswana and the Wildlife Clubs. These were originally expatriate-led and, although they are not identified with particular economic interests like their settler-led equivalents in, say, Zimbabwe, their concerns are still sometimes dismissed as "a white man's problem". In fact, to quite a large extent the whole NGO movement in Botswana has until recently been identified with the expatriate white community. However, with the growth of an urban salaried middle class these conservationist NGOs may be taking on a new black leadership, together with some of the characteristics of environmental pressure groups in Europe or the USA. One new NGO, Somorelang Tikologo (or "Environment Watch Botswana") may be regarded as the urban equivalent of a conservationist NGO, with interests in waste recycling as well as the general promotion of environmental awareness.
Other independent national NGOs include the Forum on Sustainable Agriculture (FONSAG), Thusano Lefatsheng, working in agricultural development and the promotion of "veld products", and CORDE, with its work in training and support for other NGOs. A few of the longer-operating national NGOs are very well-known and have evolved into established national institutions or parastatals (Botswana Brigades, Botswana Technology Centre, Rural Industries Promotions). The recent modest growth in NGOs has included some local conservationist NGOs, and is partly in response to donor pressure, including international concern over the environment. This carries the danger of a proliferation of "environmental" NGOs with rather shallow commitment either to community or to environmental values. However, some of these new local NGOs, like TOCT, may combine local community and white conservationist interests in a genuine effort to represent local environmental concerns.

Although NGOs have been involved in formal consultations on environmental policy, they do not have a strong input. For example, Botswana's National Conservation Strategy (NCS) was adopted in 1990 after a substantial consultation programme including NGOs, but has not been implemented. Despite this, an international public relations firm was used to help the government present it at the Rio conference. NGOs have not been able to exert any real pressure towards adopting some of the NCS policies, particularly since they at times conflict with policies on agriculture or tourism, which tend to prevail because of their immediate economic importance.

It is not just a question of lack of political muscle on the part of NGOs. They do not appear to form an important part of the political culture of Botswana. For example, none of the 75 draft recommendations from the 1993 Symposium on "Botswana in the 21st Century", seven of which were specifically about integrating economic development and environmental protection, fifteen on multi-party democracy and human rights, and nine on the future of agriculture, mentioned NGOs or their role in any way (despite the fact that the symposium was hosted by the Botswana Society, itself an NGO!).

However, there have been a few cases where NGOs with an environmental concern have been able to prevent projects going ahead or delay the implementation of certain policies. Apart from the shelving of the SOIWDP, which we are examining here, there have been other examples including the so-called "Ghanzi farms" and the new wildlife policy. This latter was passed in 1992 to replace the previous scheme on controlled hunting areas, but was opposed by TOCT and other NGOs because it effectively favoured the development of private rights to the utilisation of natural resources, and was not immediately implemented. The government said there was a need for "consultation", but in fact there was a virtual stalemate. So far, however, despite their occasional ability to obstruct, there appear to be very few examples, if any, of NGOs in Botswana having any major input into policy development.
As far as the campaign against the SOIWDP is concerned, it was certainly the case that NGOs of different types undertook very different kinds of activities. KCS, for example, thought in terms of maintaining a long-term collaborative relationship with government and avoiding public confrontation. It was able to achieve representation on the government's water development committee, to lobby behind the scenes and to get replies on various technical questions, and it is possible that its links with Debswana had some bearing on that organization's withdrawal from supporting the project, although this last suggestion is speculative.

The individuals who formed TOCT, on the other hand, worked by mobilising the local population and were not afraid of confrontation. After the SOIWDP was shelved, TOCT continued to work in the area of mass education on conservation issues. They have noticed that although local communities have traditionally been the guardians of their own environments, nowadays there is a tendency to blame government or safari operators for resources being taken away and hence to neglect the environment almost out of spite. For example, the government can seem to care more about wildlife than about people: it is said that more effort goes into catching someone who has illegally hunted and killed a buffalo than someone who has caused a fatal road accident. TOCT has a video and generator and has received support from IUCN and OWLS, though none from government. According to Frank Ramsden it tries to show educational videos "to revitalise the spirit, to make people committed again to what they used to do naturally in looking after their own environment."

It should however be noted that in 1993 and 1994 TOCT suffered a split between safari operators and local people over the government's land use plan. If another engineering scheme was brought forward in the context of a water crisis it is by no means certain that TOCT would once again be able to mobilise.

As noted, international NGOs also became involved in the campaign and their roles were different again. The most openly confrontational were the South African activists centred on Rick Lomba and including OWLS and others. The latter organization's leaflet Botswana Beef - What's at Steak (OWLS 1992) demonstrates clearly the confrontational style of the organization. The illustration reproduced in Figure 2 typifies this confrontational stance.

Greenpeace seems to have brought a reputation more than anything. It appears that mentioning their name provided a credible threat even though there is no evidence that the organization officially made any decision to campaign on the issue beyond sending a study team, or made any formal threats of any kind, and it is unclear that it had the capacity to mount a successful boycott of beef or diamonds. The study team itself lent a certain scientific credibility to the campaign, but it was the IUCN which later provided a scientific research capacity.
These NGOs were acting in complementary ways which worked together very effectively. They were not, however, deliberately coordinated. As we have seen, TOCT was formed through disagreement with KCS and they did not work together, although the presence of a new campaigning group may have reinforced KCS in its position as a responsible collaborating NGO partner for government. TOCT did work with Greenpeace for the duration of the study tour, but there was no coordinated international campaign as such.

Before leaving this point one should note that if anything it was individuals rather than NGOs who provided coordination. It was as individuals that the white conservationist and Batawana activists mobilised the Maun community for the kgotla of 11 January 1991, while they were still in the process of forming TOCT as an organization. Rick Lomba was acting as an individual in talking up the possibility of an international campaign and contacting international NGOs ands the press, and hence NGOs like Greenpeace were to an extent able to distance themselves from his wilder statements. The slogan "Diamonds are for Death" was effective in being communicated as an idea or a rumour although it was not taken up officially by Greenpeace or any other NGO.
3.3 Internationalising the Issue

Another interpretation is that it was the way the issue became internationalised that forced the government to think again. This internationalisation included the involvement of international NGOs, the fact that other international actors had a relevant interest, and the way the issue itself could be framed as an international rather than just a local or national issue, thus legitimising the involvement of outside parties.

Local-international NGO linkages appear to be of particular importance to local NGO campaigns. In this case, there was the involvement of South African activists and TOCT's link with Greenpeace International, with the concomitant threat, real or perceived, of international NGO lobbying. As we have seen, these linkages were ad hoc - at the strongest they formed what Bernie Eccleston (1996) calls a coalition (a "single event joint campaign ... among fairly diverse NGOs [with] division of labour [and] limited life") rather than a permanent network. There was certainly no agreed "long term allegiance to common ideals", which Eccleston considers to be a defining feature of an NGO alliance (1996, p.74).

Northern-based international NGOs have been of increasing importance in Africa from the early 1980s. In some case, such as in Mozambique, NGOs are accused of effectively setting up parallel administrations, undermining state control and acting as agents of recolonization on behalf of their home (Northern) governments (Hanlon, 1991). However, Botswana has to some extent been protected from the necessity of allowing open access to Northern-based NGOs by its record of economic growth. The Botswana government has been able to accept the aid of Northern-based NGOs on its own terms. These NGOs have tended to work through government agencies rather than independently or in partnership with indigenous NGOs, which have hardly been in evidence until very recently.

Thus, despite their reduced role compared to other African countries, local branches of international NGOs have been important in the Botswana NGO scene, with some of their expatriate staff taking leading roles in other NGOs as well. For example, since the events described above Karen Ross has been employed in Maun by the US NGO Conservation International. However, one should note that the Northern-based NGOs that figured in the campaign against the SOIWDP, such as Greenpeace, have had few if any links with Botswana before or after the campaign. In the case of IUCN, there is an active Regional Office for Southern Africa based in Harare and also an office in Gaborone, but the IUCN study was organised independently of the latter, with members who had not recently worked in Botswana.

Eccleston (1996, p.67) suggests that local NGOs influence can be enhanced by international contact both through accessing additional resources and by opening up political space.
Certainly in this case both Greenpeace and IUCN brought scientific and organizational resources to bear which were well beyond the capacity of TOCT alone. However, as Eccleston also points out, international collaboration can be a two-edged sword, having the potential at times to diminish the influence of NGOs on policy makers as well as to widen the political space in which they work. The SOIWDP campaign certainly shows how issues are perceived differently internationally from how they are perceived locally. It remains to be seen whether summoning international assistance will cause a backlash over the longer term or whether it will continue to be a powerful occasional weapon for the relatively weak Botswana NGO movement.

The fact that other international actors had a relevant involvement, particularly the EU and De Beers with respect to the beef and diamonds industries respectively, may also have been important. There were other international actors as well, such as SMEC and the Australian government which part funded their work, the ODA, and potentially donors who may have backed the project financially. Although their interests would have been enhanced by the project they might have been targets for lobbying if a full-scale international campaign had been launched. However, in the case of the EU and De Beers there were more immediate possibilities of damage to their interests.

Although Botswana has a reputation for a successful free market economy, it is in fact heavily dependent on South Africa. To a lesser extent it relies on the EU, for subsidies on its beef exports. 80% of total imports of goods and services originate in South Africa, South Africans form the greatest number of tourists, and the South African media is widely available in the country. Finally, most of the foreign investment in Botswana comes from, or has close relations, with South African capital, as in the case of diamond mining where the main operator is jointly owned by the Botswana Government and De Beers and the output is exported via an agreement with De Beers, which maintains a global monopoly on diamond sales.

Thus South African environmentalists with their ability to place hostile stories in the South African press cannot be entirely ignored. More importantly, however, decisions like that of De Beers to withdraw from supporting the SOIWDP may have been made outside the country, or at least with De Beers' international reputation and interests in mind, and the fact that the campaign could make a link with those interests was clearly important. Equally, whether or not it was realistic, the perceived threat of lobbying to reduce the EU beef subsidy had to be taken seriously by the Botswana government.

Finally, the issue itself could be framed as an international rather than just a local or national issue, thus legitimising the involvement of outside parties. At a national level, the question of whether to dredge the Boro river may have appeared to be a rather small local debate about
the best way of utilising resources in a region and about the balance of local costs and benefits. It became internationally a debate about the conservation of an ecosystem of global significance. Hence the importance of the Ramsar Convention; Botswana's refusal to nominate the Okavango as a World Heritage Site can be seen as an attempt to keep the issue a national one. However, to some extent the Botswana government also helped promote the broader view of the SOIWDP as an international issue by commissioning the IUCN, an international NGO, to undertake the independent assessment.

3.4 The Lack of Impact on Major Economic Stakeholders

We have seen how the campaigners, particularly those outside the country such as Rick Lomba, tried to emphasise links between the issue of dredging the Boro and economic sectors of central importance to Botswana and its ruling elite, notably the diamonds and beef industry. Both these sectors involved links with international actors on whom leverage could be exerted and arguably this helped the campaign.

However, it is equally arguable that it was the relative lack of importance of the SOIWDP to the major economic stakeholders within Botswana that allowed the government to drop the project with relatively little fuss in the end. According to this view, it was not that De Beers was put off by threats, but rather that the Orapa mine had little need for additional water beyond what it could source more locally from groundwater. Also the downturn in the diamonds industry took the urgency out of Debswana's need for water at Orapa, so there was no point in De Beers risking its reputation with international environmentalists by backing the scheme at that time.

Similarly, the efforts by Rick Lomba, OWLS and others to depict Botswana's "beef barons" as determined to take over the whole country for cattle ranching may have some truth in it. The Northern Wildlife Area was certainly being cut up into separate protected areas with large areas of rangeland in between given over to cattle, such as that immediately to the north-east of the Okavango Delta. However, there is no evidence of any immediate plans to bring cattle into the delta itself, so there was no need for the beef lobby to back the SOIWDP.

In the case of the Northern Buffalo Fence, the beef industry had a more direct interest. In that case there was in fact more follow-up to the Greenpeace report, including concerted lobbying in the EU and the European Parliament, which led for example to the latter's Intergroup on Animal Welfare passing a resolution calling for an EIA to be undertaken on the impact of the fence and writing to the Botswana government about the matter. OWLS had already been campaigning against the Botswana beef industry for several years on the grounds that the increase in veterinary fences and general giving over of land for cattle was doing irreparable damage to Botswana's wildlife. This included calls for a lobby of the EU, the World Bank and
other foreign donors (Lomba 1992), but their support for the Botswana beef industry was not diminished. Probably as outsiders they would not wish to question what an independent country's government presented as its central economic interests, particularly when that country's healthy economic position meant it provided a good investment target relative to the rest of Africa.

Thus where the interests of major economic stakeholders are directly implicated there is less chance of forcing a policy change. In the case of the SOIWDP, even with the international links and possibilities of international lobbying, it is not at all clear that the campaigners could have prevailed if the project had been of real importance to the beef or diamonds industries.

4 Explanations for Continuing Lack of Resolution

We have noted that the "termination" of the SOIWDP left unresolved issues in two main areas. First, at the local level, how are the ever-increasing requirements for water in Maun and its surrounding communities to be met? Second, what is the future of the Okavango Delta? Is there any way in which it can remain a local common for local people? Are the waters of the Okavango to be considered a national resource available to assist the modernization of the country, or is the delta to have formal international protection, for example by nomination as a World Heritage Site or under the Ramsar Convention?

At least up to late 1996 these matters remained unresolved. Once again, there are competing explanations for this lack of resolution. These can also be seen as explanations for why the NGO campaign's success was less than complete. There are some special factors, such as the fact that Maun and the delta region is inhabited by minority ethnic groups (including some Europeans), while Botswana is for the most part fairly homogeneous ethnically. This might lead the government to give relatively low priority to local problems such as Maun's water supply unless they are linked to national issues. More generalisable possible explanations include the nature of the Botswana state, limitations on the part of the NGOs and the intractability of the issue. We consider these three in turn.

4.1 Botswana's Strong Developmentalist State

The other side of the coin of Botswana's democracy is the strength and autonomy of the state. Post-independence Botswana has been characterised as a "de facto one-party state through the ballot box" (Tsie 1993, p.36) and its government as run by a politico-administrative elite under a policy-making system described as "paternalistic developmentalism" (Charlton 1991, p.276).

To characterise the Botswana state fully as less or more amenable to influence from NGOs, one must consider this dimension as well as that of democracy. Most sub-Saharan African
states exhibit extreme weakness and lack of capacity and reach. Botswana, by contrast, has many features which Leftwich (1994) argues are characteristic of strong, developmental states, whether democratic or authoritarian: inter-penetration of political and administrative elites; the relative autonomy of these elites from special interests and hence their ability to act in the "national interest"; a weak civil society dominated by the state; and a successfully managed economy.

Part of the strength of the Botswana state lies in its centralised technocratic decision-making. As noted above, the general rule is for technical aspects of new developments to be worked out by officials in some secrecy and for public consultations to take place prior to implementation but with no expectation that basic changes will be made. This takes place with clear political control over major policy decisions. There is also the possibility for new policy directions sometimes to be taken quite suddenly in response to some perceived political necessity (e.g. to negate a possible political advantage that an opposition party might gain from raising an issue in a particular way). Thus one might expect influence to be potentially exercised in two ways: by "inside" access to the technical work of officials; or by making an issue gain sufficient political importance (either vis-à-vis the multi-party system or with respect to some other power centre that could affect the Botswana government) to provoke a sudden change.

However, it is quite in character for that change to be unexplained; and also for the officials to try to keep their area of expertise free from outside influence except on their own terms. In this case, the DWA, as a technical department, would want to keep the prerogative of defining new technical projects in-house. This may explain why the government was unwilling to accept the technical criticisms in the IUCN report or to work on its alternative recommendations, preferring to cite popular local opinion and pressure from outside the country as reasons for its forced change of policy. There has also been some insistence that the technical aspects of the IUCN report go no further that the work produce by SMEC and that the only difference is in interpretation. Moremi Sekwale, the Director of the DWA at the time, stated that he would not have accepted the IUCN report had it been contracted directly from the department.

Reluctance to accept another agency's alternative when detailed design work has been done already may help explain the lack of a fully worked out plan for providing Maun and the riparian communities with a secure water supply. In fact several measures have been taken since 1992, most of which are in line with recommendations of the IUCN report, but they have been implemented in a piecemeal fashion. These include the water treatment plant mentioned above, at least two deep boreholes, and plans for improved pumping. There is also the possibility of a flexible pipeline from somewhere in the centre of the delta, something
suggested by some locals at the public meeting in the Duck Inn and the subsequent *kgotla*, but not in the IUCN report.

Also, as noted, tight political control is kept over policy. This means that although an initiative may be shelved because of outside political pressure, new policy formulation is not open to interests outside the elite. Botswana has quite strong state autonomy and wishes to maintain it. Unwillingness to give too much power either to local interests or to international interests such as conservationist NGOs may help explain why Botswana continues to refuse to sign the Ramsar or World Heritage Conventions. There is a similar reluctance to admit the dependence on South African interests including De Beers, although that dependence cannot be completely denied. In general, therefore, one can understand why the Botswana government is so insistent that the option of developing the waters of the Okavango remains open.

### 4.2 Limitations on the Part of the NGOs

On the whole the NGOs were quite successful in the immediate objective of their campaign to stop the dredging. However, they have not been able to do more. They were not able to persuade the government to join the Ramsar Convention or to promote successfully the IUCN team's alternative proposals for local development.

Partly this is a question of a lack of continuing capacity on the part of the various NGOs concerned. In different ways, they all responded to what they saw as a crisis by a big short-term effort. For Greenpeace this was a combination of immediate reactions in terms of writing letters and so on, plus arranging a one-off study tour and finding a small team to carry it out. Greenpeace had never prioritised conservationist issues in Southern Africa and by 1996 still had no staff member with a brief permanently including that part of the world. Hence its capacity to follow up the issue once the crisis had passed was virtually nil.

As for IUCN, it was contracted to undertake a study over a specified period and its team of professional scientists from other parts of the world could not be expected to pursue the issue once their report was completed. In fact, Ted Scudder has continued to take a considerable personal interest and to write on the subject, warning that there is still a possibility of a new water development project at any time.

The individuals who formed TOCT and the other conservationist activists such as Rick Lomba and OWLS also reacted to the crisis by investing a lot of time over a short period to mobilise the communities and to communicate to the media and international NGOs. Again, this degree of voluntary effort could not be expected to be continued over a protracted period. Apart from some minor material assistance from OWLS and from IUCN, TOCT always had
very little in the way of established resources. Over the period following the campaign it lacked the government support given to established NGOs like KCS and even the proper status that would allow it to attract tax-efficient donations from likely supporters.

The exception, the only NGO involved which does have ongoing capacity, is KCS. It remains to be seen whether its quiet 'insider' strategy will gain results over the long term.

Apart from lack of capacity, another weakness of the campaigning NGOs was the fact that they did not represent clearly united interests. One contention is that the anti-SOIWDP campaign was led by expatriates in Maun with interest specifically in wildlife conservation and connections to safari companies. In this view the local NGOs such as TOCT that became involved were not really representative of local opinion and the international NGOs such as Greenpeace took up the issue without fully understanding the local situation. This possible lack of representativeness and of full political accountability means that in the longer term the Botswana government feels free to ignore these interests.

Of course there could be evidence to the contrary. For example, if TOCT continued growing in local support from both members of local communities and conservationists it would be clear that this is not really a weakness but a strength. However, as mentioned above, TOCT suffered a split during 1993 and 1994 between its safari operator members and others over the land use plan. It appears that while there may have been a temporary coincidence of objective between the white conservationists and the members of the local communities in TOCT, there was no underlying unity of interests. Hence a concerted campaign over a long period cannot be expected.

4.3 The Intractability of the Issue

Finally, it should not be forgotten that in many respects conflicts over water resources in an arid region can only be expected to become more intense. Along with South Africa and Namibia, Botswana is expected to have an overall water shortage at national level within 30 years (SARDC 1994), and much of the rest of the SADC region experiences serious periodic drought. The Okavango is a large river which is hardly utilised, and there are bound to be continuing conflicts over different possible uses for its water apart from simply feeding the delta with its wildlife and local communities. It might be possible to protect the delta to some extent through nomination as a Ramsar site, but this would not lessen the problems of water shortage both in the region as a whole and in the locality of Maun. It may be possible to find groundwater resources for both Maun and Orapa for the foreseeable future, but these groundwater resources are limited in the long term.
These conflicts might be lessened if ways could be found of generating economic benefits, through tourism or otherwise, from the delta as it stands. These benefits would have to be sufficient to outweigh over the long term the cost of the foregone opportunity of other uses for the water. In any case, the estimation of the costs and benefits of alternative schemes for developing water resources is subject to great uncertainty. The negative impact of the loss of integrity of a unique ecosystem would have to be weighed against benefits that might be extremely uncertain, given the instability of both the ecosystem and the hydrological system of the Okavango Delta.

Thus the resource conflicts around water, land and wildlife in the Okavango Delta constitute an intractable issue and as such it is not surprising that NGOs have not been able to force a long-term solution.

5 Conclusions and Implications

From the various conflicting interpretations and competing explanations, what can be concluded, and what are the implications for NGO strategy? Should NGOs adopt a confrontational strategy, calling on assistance from international NGOs, if they want to achieve influence? What are the long-term implications?

First, it appears that confrontational tactics can work in a multi-party democracy like Botswana where there is some plurality of internal power centres, at least in the short term, and if the tactics are used only in response to occasional crises.

Multy-partyism is meaningful as a source of accountability in Botswana, and the government is sensitive to the need to maintain its democratic credentials. The ruling party is also careful to avoid allowing issues to develop in such a way that the opposition could take them up to political advantage. Both local councils and the kgotla system provide alternative internal power centres, at least to some degree. If there is clear dissent from a government position at these levels then the government may give way, at least temporarily, if only to maintain control over the political agenda in the longer term.

However, there may also be arguments in favour of collaboration even where the participative political culture is weak, as it tends to be in Botswana. Although there is only a very limited record of successful NGO influence obtained by the 'insider' methods of KCS, there is clearly some potential for behind-the-scenes influence. In general the Botswana government is not lacking in technical expertise or administrative capacity, so there is little potential for NGO influence through filling gaps. However, the environment may be one important area for future policy where the expertise built up to date is not sufficiently relevant. The Botswana
government may be forced to call on NGOs to assist, as it did with both Greenpeace and IUCN.

What lessons can be learnt about the strategy of making international links? There seems to be some danger of a backlash if this is carried out without regard for the sensitivity of government to issues of sovereignty and the desire to maintain control over national resources. If the issue can be defined so that it is clearly an international issue, this will help to avoid such a backlash. The Okavango basin is now subject to international negotiations between Botswana, Namibia and Angola, even though the delta is still not nominated as a Ramsar or World Heritage Site. Hence it is hard for the government to maintain that the use or conservation of the resources of the Okavango is purely an internal issue for Botswana.

There is also some evidence of a more positive long-term effect that may override the danger of a backlash. This is a sort of demonstration effect. Campaigns like that over the SOIWDP show that it is possible to oppose government and win. As was noted above, for some time there have been occasional cases where NGOs in Botswana have been able to prevent certain projects or policies from going ahead. The more they do this, the more their credibility grows and others copy them. It may not be long before Molutsi and Holm's (1990) verdict that civil society is weak in Botswana may have to be revised.

This trend may combine with the increasing difficulty for the Botswana government in maintaining complete sovereignty over issues that the rest of the world considers to be international, possibly opening up more political space for NGOs in Botswana. There may also be some potential to refer to increased international commitment to the idea of a bigger role for NGOs. For example, Botswana has now signed the Convention to Combat Desertification, which includes a commitment to local participation and the involvement of NGOs at all levels.

Thus, although successfully confronting government carries the danger of longer-term reaction to limit the activities of the NGOs concerned, this may be outweighed by the demonstration effect and the general trend towards a bigger role for NGOs.

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