

# The effects of tourism can strain or ease development: A tale of three stakeholder groups in the Vhembe district (South Africa)

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**Abstract** | Collaboration between different stakeholders in the tourism industry is widely advocated but, in many cases, it is a challenge which might be the very factor that hampers development. Stakeholders' collaboration supports the sustainable management of the tourism industry, bringing together the community, the public and private sectors. However, the success rate over the last 20 years in South Africa is limited. As a possible reason for unsuccessful collaboration efforts, this study explores the roles and expectations of three stakeholder groups in developing the tourism sector. A mixed-methods approach was applied, to collect data from residents, tourism businesses and local government employees in the Vhembe district. Due to the unavailability of detailed residential and business information in this district, convenience sampling was applied for the quantitative research (self-administered questionnaires), resulting in 520 residents and 100 tourism businesses participating. Purposive sampling was used for the qualitative research resulting in 30 municipality employees surveyed through semi-structured interviews. It was clear from the results that collaboration is important to all the stakeholders, which supports previous studies. It was also found that the three stakeholder groups have different perceptions of the effects of tourism development, which contributes to slow development. It is recommended that more should be done to integrate the expectations of all stakeholders and different stakeholder groups to form a collaborative group to speak on behalf of the different stakeholders and develop an integrated plan with buy-in and role clarification of all stakeholders. Added to that, the expectations should be determined before tourism development can happen to resolve issues before venturing into development. One of the major drawbacks of tourism development, in many cases, is the lack of a coordinated and integrated effort.

**Keywords** | Tourism development, stakeholders, community, tourism businesses, Vhembe

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## 1. Introduction

Although the notion of stakeholders has been known before, the systemized stakeholder approach emerged in the 1980s (Peric, Durkin, & Lamot, 2014). Hardy and Pearson (2016) and Reed (2008) articulates stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by achieving the organisation's objectives. Duncan (2008); Gough and Duncan (2008); Fairer-Wessels and Van der Walt (2007) indicated that stakeholders are usually organisations or people who earn money from a business or have an interest in how well the business is run. Whereas Anuar, Ahmad, Jusoh and Husain (2012) suggested that the term stakeholders in tourism may refer to tourists (as the demand); industries (as the supplier) and hosts as the local community and environment. Ultimately, Brokaj (2014); Gough and Duncan (2008) and Pearson, Swart, Vermeulen and Malan (2007:41), conceded that stakeholders in the tourism industry are public sector, private sector or tourism businesses, tourists and communities.

Stakeholder engagements accentuate the dynamic management of the business environment, relationships and the promotion of shared interests (Lekaota & Saarinen, 2015; Peric et al., 2014). These engagements can have positive impacts on both financial performance and stakeholders' attitudes and behaviours towards tourism development (Bogan, Turkey, & Dedeoglu, 2018; Ghaderi, Mirzapour, Henderson, & Richardson, 2019). Therefore, the importance of stakeholders in the tourism industry should not be underestimated, and their attitudes and relationships are paramount for sustainable tourism to be achieved (Hardy & Pearson, 2016; Yilmaz & Gunel, 2009). With that said, previous research indicates many challenges in this regard. The stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders to pool together the resources (Gursoy, Boğan, Dedeoğlu, & Çalışkan, 2019:119).

For harmonious tourism development, sta-

keholders cannot expect the government to singularly carry the burdens of the tourism industry (Kumar & Dahiya, 2015). Arguably sustainable tourism cannot occur if agreement and collaboration among stakeholders do not exist (Hardy & Pearson, 2016; Jegdic, Skrbic, & Milosevic, 2017) and it requires these actors to build high levels of social cohesiveness (Nzimande & Bob, 2020). For tourism to achieve sustained services and to develop as a key growth area of the economy, there is a need for substantial public and private sector collaboration (Aref, 2011; Udumo, Arikpo, & Ekpo-Eloma, 2013). The public and private sectors are both very conscious of the need to provide attractive facilities to tourists, to increase local and national earnings (Begum, Er, Alam, & Siwar, 2014). However, in a sustainable development context, a complete set of stakeholders are needed to develop and manage tourism sustainably (Brokaj, 2014; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2022).

The way government, residents and visitors interact is critical for territorial planning through tourism policies and local community beneficitation towards the sustainable development of an area (Al Haija, 2011; De Oliveira, 2022). Bringing together different stakeholders in a partnership is crucial to determine the amount and kind of tourism a community wants (Lekaota & Saarinen, 2015; Peric et al., 2014; Tregua, D'Auria, & Marano-Marcolini, 2018). All role players in the tourism industry should be involved in the growth of tourism and should provide fair and equal opportunities to encourage communities to actively participate in tourism development (Chili & Ngxongo, 2017). However, a study conducted by Nowacki, Kowalczyk-Anioł, Królikowska, Pstrocka-Rak and Awedyk (2018) found that involvement of local or regional stakeholders in the planning process was usually limited to representatives of local or regional tourism operators.

Collaboration is thus essential in moving the tourism sector toward sustainability (Graci, 2013). Hence, stakeholders' positive and collaborative at-

itudes are vital (Hardy & Pearson, 2016; Yilmaz & Gunel, 2009). However, creating stakeholder harmonisation is not always easy. Sometimes communities or businesses feel they are providing opportunities for successful and sustainable businesses but are not receiving support from local government. This creates problems and sustainable tourism cannot occur if agreement and collaboration among stakeholders do not exist (Hardy & Pearson, 2016). Tourism businesses may not be sustainable if ongoing problems exist between different stakeholders (Gough & Duncan, 2008). Peric et al. (2014) further assert that many stakeholders in society need to work together to sustain the environment and tourism assets and contribute actively to sustainability. In essence, support of and collaboration between tourism stakeholders is essential for the development, successful operation and long-term sustainability of the tourism sector.

The role of these stakeholders can be passive or active (Eja, Out, Ewa, & Ndomah, 2011), which does not render stakeholders' roles irrelevant in the context of sustainable tourism (Anuar et al. 2012). Good cooperative governance supports effective stakeholder engagement by ensuring effective decisions and compliance with legal and ethical standards (Nzimande & Bob, 2020). However, Chili and Ngxongo (2017) posit that municipality's bureaucratic processes obstruct the community involvement, which rarely goes beyond merely informing them about possible projects that are forthcoming and information exchange as and when the community demand such information. Azizpour and Fathizadeh (2016) postulate that non-collaboration between organisations, due to partial planning and individual-based decisions, leads to division and disparity between organisations, in this case different stakeholder groups. Whilst Hanafiah, Azman, Jamaluddin and Aminuddin (2016); Nyaupane, Morais and Dowler (2006) and Prezenza, Del Chiappa and Sheehan (2013) conceded that lower levels of awareness and incompetency, lack of financial support and investment capital,

lack of government support and apathy of different actors have been identified as obstacles.

Ali, Hussain, Nair and Nair (2017) stressed that stakeholders have different opinions and perceptions towards tourism development, its economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits and support for tourism development. Thus, owing to these constraints, it is not always possible to have meaningful involvement of all the stakeholders in tourism planning (Ali et al., 2017). Stakeholders' collaboration seems challenging but current literature emphasise that diverse key tourism stakeholders are needed in implementing sustainable tourism development in rural areas and everyone should be consulted. Yet several tourism products do not come off the ground because stakeholders might have different expectations of what should happen and how it should happen - sometimes the end of this is that nothing is happening that really makes an impact.

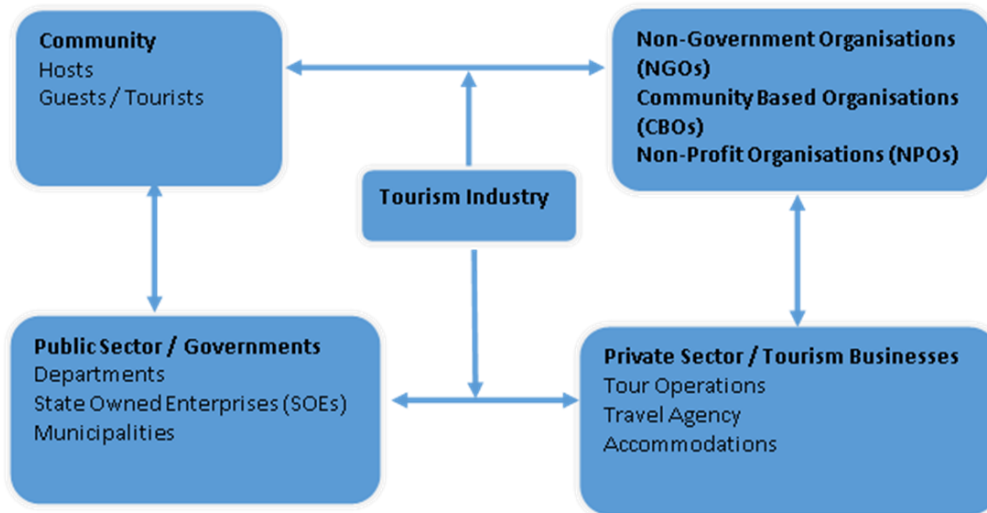
Various previous studies advocate for cooperation between stakeholders (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Carlisle, Kunc, Jones, & Tiffin, 2013) but do not seem to solve the challenges experienced in this cooperation leaving potential tourism attractions un/underdeveloped. The purpose of this research is to analyse whether different expectations strain tourism development by reviewing the opinions of three stakeholder groups functioning in the Vhembe-district.

## 2. Literature review

Tourism is all embracing, and it comprises the interface of components such as transportation, communication, accommodation, and destination, amongst others (Eja et al., 2011). Efficient management of tourism development is not possible without the cooperation and partnership of all stakeholders (Jegdic et al., 2017). Hence, involving

stakeholders becomes paramount for sustainable tourism development at destinations (Ali et al., 2017). Figure 1 below notes the variety of primary stakeholders in the tourism sector as accentuated

by Brokaj (2014); Gough and Duncan (2008); Pearson et al. (2007). It also shows the importance of cooperation and integration among these stakeholders.



**Figure 1** | Primary stakeholders in the tourism environment  
Source: Authors' compilation

For this study, social exchange theory was explored. Since the 70's, extensive studies have investigated residents' attitudes towards tourism development and identified various factors that can influence their attitudes (Gursoy, Ouyang, Nunkoo, & Wei, 2018). Studies conducted using social exchange theory suggest that a variety of factors influence residents' support for tourism development (Gursoy, Bogan, Dedeoglu, & Caliskan, 2019). Those studies reported that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts or attitudes towards tourism are influenced by potential economic gains, residents' place image, community's awareness of tourism projects, perceived future of the community, the level of community concern, community attachment, eco-centric attitudes, use of tourism resource base, state of local economy, demographical variables, and residents' identity and residents' quality of life (Bakhsh, Potwarka, Nunkoo, & Sunnassee, 2018; De Oliveira, 2022; Gursoy, Chi, & Dyer, 2010; Nunkoo & So, 2016; Gursoy, Ouyang,

Nunkoo, & Wei, 2018; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2017; Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2016; Stylidis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015). Furthermore, despite the widespread adoption of the social exchange theory, research findings on residents' perceptions of tourism development impacts differ considerably among individual studies (Gursoy et al., 2018). Some studies adopt a two-dimensional framework, for instance, benefits and costs of tourism, to evaluate the influences of residents' perceptions of positive and negative impacts on their support for tourism development, while others including this study have applied a triple-bottom-line approach focusing on economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts to assess the relationships between perceived impacts and support to tourism development.

The roles, responsibilities, expectations, and challenges of three primary stakeholders (community, businesses and government) in tourism development are explored in this research.

## 2.1. Roles and expectations of the community in tourism development

Local community is a critical stakeholder in tourism development (Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013) which requires its role to be acknowledged by disbursing benefits of tourism development locally (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020). To be successful in the tourism industry it is essential to ensure local community participation and support. This influences the sustainability of tourism development (Gursoy et al., 2019) and contribute significantly to the economic subsistence of many communities (Coles, Ritchie & Wang, 2021; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2022). Community play a crucial role in advancing the tourism sector (Wirahayu, Sumarmi, Arinta, Islam & Kurniawati, 2022). Involvement of the local community in tourism development will close the gap between governance and the use of resources in a tourist destination (Muganda et al., 2013). The local community is the centre of tourism planning and development (Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2012) and provides tourism goods and services (Muganda et al., 2013). This stakeholder interacts with other stakeholders and creates a conducive environment for tourists to enjoy their offering and play an influential role in tourists' revisiting and recommendation intentions (Gursoy et al., 2019; Lekoata & Saarinen, 2015). This stakeholder group contributes to tourism decisions of major tourism developments through public participation (Angelevska-Najdeska & Rakicevik, 2012; Aref, Gill, & Farshid, 2010), educating tourists about village culture, nature conservation (Begum et al., 2014), and identifying and promoting tourist resources that are central to community tourism development (Muganda et al., 2013). Nonetheless, local community attitudes and behaviours towards tourism are likely to vary depending on a destinations' lifecycle stage and the type of development (Gursoy et al., 2019).

To amass economic gains, communities depend on the area they live in and appreciate the kinds

of tourists that visit (Canalejo, Tabales, López, & Fuentes-García, 2015; Gough & Duncan, 2008). This stakeholder group expects the government to provide impartial legislation pertaining to financial access (Chirenje, Chitotombe, Gukurume, Chazovachii, & Chitongo, 2013) and that they assist the community economically, socio-culturally and environmentally (Ali et al., 2017).

Previous studies indicated that a community that benefit economically from this sector are likely to support the tourism industry (Canalejo et al., 2015; Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2017) and put more emphasis on economic gains than undesirable impacts to maintain community satisfaction (Cavus & Tannisevdi, 2003; Dyer, Gursoy, Sharma, & Carter, 2007). Yet, Bimonte and Punzo (2016); Eshliki and Kaboudi (2012); Lekoata and Khashane (2019) and Lo, Songan, Mohammad, and Yeo (2013) observed that the lack of community participation in the decision-making process of tourism development, in both developing and developed nations, prompt the decision-making process to be limited or sometimes marginalised and this results in a decrease in employment prospects. Whereas Chirenje et al. (2013) posited that local community participation produces a combination of a robust individual and shared asset base for the local communities as well as refining the share of profits they gain from having tourists in their areas. Eshliki and Kaboudi (2017); Ogunjinmi and Braimoh (2018) posit that in developing countries, infrastructure is required but not necessarily provided to enable participation in decision-making which deters community participation in tourism development. These narratives show the inequalities in the power of different stakeholders in the community (Lukhele, 2013).

## 2.2. Roles and expectations of the businesses in tourism development

Tourism is largely privately owned by industri-

alists and entrepreneurs (Duncan, 2008; Duarte, Marujo, & Simoes, 2022), which bears the significant investment risks. This notion necessitates the importance of being profit driven (Balalia & Petrescu, 2011). Typically, the private sector interacts with visitors and appreciates these interactions as they depend on them financially (Eusebio, Kastenholz, & Breda, 2014). Furthermore, these businesses also consult with the government and local communities to outline investment plans in the tourism industry (Agholor, Smith, Akeem, & Seriki, 2015; Cheuk, Liew-Tsonis, Ing, & Razli, 2010; Makakane, 2014).

Subsequently, the private sector is as delicate to the market as any other stakeholder and is concerned about financial stability, remuneration and economic sustainability from tourism (Aniah et al., 2009). Despite the positive contribution that tourism can bring to the community and local businesses, the private sector expects to have a say in the tourism development process of the village (Eusebio et al., 2014) and also expect the government to support new businesses by creating an enabling atmosphere for them to flourish (Duncan, 2008). Gough and Duncan (2008) summarised the expectations of businesses among communities and government in Table 1.

**Table 1** | Expectations of business in relation to communities and government

COMMUNITIES TO	GOVERNMENT TO
Support their efforts in building successful businesses	Give them more training and financial assistance
Welcome tourists into their communities	Provide better infrastructure
Keep the areas neat and clean	Provide better security
Assist with the security and safety of tourists	Promote and market their businesses more successfully

Source: Duncan (2008, p. 143)

Al Haija (2011); Balalia and Petrescu (2011) and Fairer-Wessels and Van der Walt (2007) found that increasing involvement of the private sector in the diversification of the product by offering services such as guiding services, marketing support services, travel trade press, private education

and training establishments and investing in tourism projects is one of the most important points of sustainable tourism. Meanwhile, Cheuk et al. (2010) stated that private sector's involvement in decision-making, specifically mapping out the way forward of development, has been largely uninspiring, and tourism planning largely remained the domain of the public sector. On the other hand, Udumo et al. (2013) indicated that if the private sector is allowed to participate in tourism development, the financial standing and developmental strides of the public sector increase and can be appreciated by all.

### 2.3. Roles and expectations of government in tourism development

In a predominately privately-owned tourism industry, government develops and formulates legislative frameworks and policies in national, regional and local spheres of governance (Balalia & Petrescu, 2011; Gough & Duncan, 2008; Miocic, Razovic, & Klarin, 2016). This is directed at the development of strategies and plans for sustainable tourism that is specifically aligned with the needs of the destination areas (Cameron, Memon, Simmons, & Fairweather, 2001). Several governments of emerging nations, encourage the growth of the tourism industry through massive investment in their own countries for economic viability and diversification of the industry (Balalia & Petrescu, 2011; Simpson, 2008; Stone, 2015). Moreover, Ali et al. (2017) posit that governments should also work on identifying profiles of different stakeholders, monitoring their attitudes and behaviour and employing different strategies to engage them in all tourism development efforts.

In South Africa, it is the mandate of the provincial government, such as the one in Limpopo where this study was conducted, to develop and promote the tourism industry in cognisance of the resources available in a particular province (Republic of

South Africa, 1996). With the local governments being responsible for the implementation of national government policies and representing the third tier of public sector tourism management (Nel & Rogerson, 2016), this is where most interactions with businesses occur, and decisions regarding policy and tourism development are made (Duncan, 2008).

Territorial local authorities or local governments create and contribute to tourism development and manage tourism effects in a destination (Cameron et al., 2001), provide by-laws, training and funding for tourism ventures; as well as facilitate the participation of local communities in the tourism industry (Gohori & Van der Merwe, 2021; Simpson, 2008). Hatipoglu, Alvarez and Ertuna (2016) and Ruhanen (2013) posit that planning and implementing sustainability measures at the destination level are often in the hands of or coordinated by local government. Critically, Butler and Rogerson (2016) found that local governments should be active agents of change as part of the broader responsibilities for local economic development (LED) to realise inclusive growth from tourism prospects. Yet, effective planning and management of tourism at the destination level is a challenge to local government entities (Brokaj, 2014). Simpson (2008) indicated that the government has reduced its status to become a mere tax collector from successful operations, providing little or no assistance to struggling initiatives. Ali et al. (2017) postulate that the government has not been successful in involving the local communities and other stakeholders in the process of tourism development.

The roles and expectations of tourism stakeholders are significantly different, and harmonisation is then challenging, thus hampering development.

### 3. Research methods

The research was conducted in 2018 in the Vhembe district, Limpopo province (South Africa), where several tourism initiatives have been planned but very few have been successful. To ensure the inclusion of different stakeholders, a mixed-methods approach was implemented by combining the strong points of both qualitative and quantitative research.

#### 3.1. Geographical area of study

This study was conducted in the Vhembe district, which is in the northern part of the Limpopo province and shares borders with Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Mozambique. The district covers 21 407 square kilometers of land with a total population of 1 393 949 people (Stats SA, 2016). The district's economic growth is focused on agriculture, tourism and mining (Ramaano, 2021). The Vhembe district has real, authentic and unspoilt resources. It boasts beautiful scenery ranging from sub-tropical environment and mountainous areas to unspoiled bushveld and majestic Baobabs (Ramaano, 2019). However, the district is having a high unemployment rate, there is a high dependency on social grants and most of the people rely on subsistence farming (Maemu, 2023; Nefale, 2016; Ofoegbu, Chirwa, Francis, & Babalola, 2016). Tourism can be considered as a possible solution to some of the challenges facing the district.

#### 3.2 Qualitative research

##### 3.2.1 Sampling

The local government of the Vhembe district was selected for the qualitative research to ensure in-depth discussions since this stakeholder group

is seen as a change agent. According to Local government (2012/13) resources, the total number of municipal employees in the entire Vhembe district was 3 929. The population was deemed suitable for statistical purposes in the study, and it was expected that respondents would yield accurate information to contribute towards solving the problem and supporting the purpose of this study.

Purposive sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2017) was applied by selecting 30 participants from the Department of Planning and Development as well as the offices of municipal managers. These employees drive matters related to the municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and Local Economic Development (LED) cluster, which incorporates tourism, business and agriculture. Thirty interviews were conducted with employees of Vhembe District Municipality, Musina Local Municipality, Mutale Local Municipality, Makhado Local Municipality and Thulamela Local Municipality. See Table 2 for a description of the participants.

### 3.2.2. Data collection

Primary data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews using an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions related to selected topics. The questioning style was informal, and the phrasing and sequencing of questions varied from interview to interview (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Gravetter & Forzano, 2009; Kothari & Garg 2014). The information acquired included demographic information (Brokaj, 2014; Festus & Omoboye, 2015), employees' view on the role of tourism development in the area (Butler, & Rogerson, 2016; Ali et al., 2017), involvement of members of the community in tourism development (Azizpour & Fathizadeh, 2016; Butler & Rogerson, 2016; Chirenje et al., 2013), and the ways in which communities are benefiting economically from tourism (Hardy, & Pearson, 2016; Lekaota & Saarinen, 2015). The researcher conducted the interviews in person over

a period of seven months at the different municipal offices of each selected employee, with each lasting on average 60 minutes. Data can be seen under section 4.4 (The views and perspectives of the government).

### 3.2.3. Analysis

Data was organised according to the sequence of the questions so that it is easy to follow, and it allowed the systematic identification of concepts and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013), which goes beyond word or phrase counting to analysis in identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas (Alhojailan, 2012; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The data was analysed by reading the transcripts of interview questions, key words were highlighted and clustered enabling a manual thematic approach. A systematic method was adopted through coding techniques for identifying the underlying ideas in the data; grouping together similar types of information into categories; linking different ideas and themes to one another; finding and organising ideas and concepts by looking at frequently used words/phrases, finding meaning in language usage, reviewing unexpected answers; building over-arching themes in the data; ensuring reliability and validity in the data analysis and the findings through triangulation methods; and discussing possible and plausible explanations for the findings. This resulted in 3 themes.

## 3.3. Quantitative research

### 3.3.1. Sampling

#### 3.3.1.1. For residents

A two-pronged approach was followed, and stratification sampling was applied in each municipality. Large samples enable researchers to draw more accurate conclusions and make more ac-



curate predictions (Chander, 2017; Khalilzadeh & Tasci, 2017; Taherdoost, 2017). With 1 393 949 as the population in the Vhembe district, 380 questionnaires were deemed adequate for this study based on the guidelines of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). These authors indicate that as the population increases at a diminishing rate (plateau) it eventually remains constant at slightly more than 380 cases. It is thus not scientifically necessary to sample beyond about 380 cases. However, 520 questionnaires were distributed to ensure adequate data and make provision for incomplete questionnaires. One hundred and seventy questionnaires were distributed in Thulamela area, 140 questionnaires in Makhado area, 110 questionnaires in Mutale area and 100 questionnaires in Musina. Neighbourhoods close to tourist attractions were included in the study and through convenience sampling the necessary number of questionnaires was obtained. Data was collected over a period of three months by fieldworkers trained for the purposes of this study. See Table 2 for a description of the respondents.

### 3.3.1.2. *For tourism businesses*

With the number of tourism businesses in the Vhembe district unknown, convenience sampling was applied. This sampling refers to the situations where population elements are selected because they are easily and conveniently available (Maree, 2016). The sample selection was also based on the proximity of the businesses to main tourist attractions in the Vhembe district. Consultation with the Local Tourism Associations (LTAs) and municipalities in the region was done to determine the areas where data could be collected. One hundred questionnaires were distributed equally among the four local municipalities (Thulamela, Mutale, Makhado and Musina). The data was collected simultaneously with the residents' survey. See Table 2 for a description of the respondents.

### 3.3.2. *Data collection*

#### 3.3.2.1. *Residents (Community)*

The questionnaire consisted of four sections consisting of open and close-ended questions. Section A, Demographic profile, focusing on gender, age, language and highest level of education (Festus & Omoboye, 2015; Scholtz & Slabbert, 2016) whilst Section B, assessed the perceptions of residents on rural tourism as a tool for development consisting of overall visitors impact on the community and on individual (Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2012; Matiza, & Oni, 2014; Scholtz & Slabbert, 2016; Muganda, 2009; Muganda & Sirima, 2013). Section C, focused on the effects of tourism on the residents consisting of both positive and negative effects on economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects of sustainable tourism (Egbali et al., 2011; Ghulam-Rabbany, Afrin, Rahman, Islam, & Hoque, 2013; Lekaota & Saarinen, 2015; Muganda & Sirima, 2013; Viviers, Slabbert, & Sayman, 2007; Zaei & Zaei, 2013), whilst Section D, focused on using of rural tourism resources and its influence on the development and the contribution to entrepreneurship (Eja et al., 2011; Sharif & Lonik, 2014; Sima, Bordânc, & Sima, 2015). Data can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3.

#### 3.3.2.2. *Tourism businesses*

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A focusing on the business profile consisting of type of business, type of enterprise, business sector, size of business, profit generated per month, number of full-time and part-time employees and Section B focusing on the perceptions of business owners towards tourism development as determined by the in-depth literature reviews (Aniah et al., 2009; Balalia & Petrescu, 2011; Cheuk et al., 2010; Duncan, 2008; Lekaota, 2015; Udumo et al., 2013). Data can be seen in Table 4.

### 3.3.3. Data analysis

The data for both the residents and tourism businesses survey were collected and captured in SPSS (Version 24). Community and business owners' perceptions of the impacts of rural tourism in the Vhembe district were analysed by descriptive results.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Profiles of the three stakeholder groups

It is clear from Table 2 that there was an equal representation of males and females for residents,

whereas most municipal employees were male. Tshivenda language was the most spoken by residents and municipal employees. Just over half of the residents' sample possess tertiary qualifications whilst just under half of the municipal employees were holders of diplomas and degrees. Most of the municipal interviewees were in management positions. Most of the tourism businesses are formally registered, predominately privately owned and part of the accommodation sub-sector. Many of these businesses were categorised as micro businesses. Table 2 further indicates that 34% of businesses' profit margin per month ranges between R11 000 – R20 000 while only 1% generated more than R60 000 of profit.

**Table 2 | Socio-demographic details of respondents and participants**

RESIDENTS	Percentage	TOURISM BUSINESSES	Percentage	MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES	Percentage
<b>Gender</b> Male Female	48% 52%	<b>Type of business</b> Formal Informal	81% 19%	<b>Gender</b> Male Female	66.7% 33.3%
<b>Age</b> Younger than 30 years of age Between 31 – 40 years of age Between 41 – 50 years of age Between 51 – 60 years of age Older than 60 years of age	42% 25.1% 19.5% 7.1% 6.3%	<b>Type of enterprise</b> Public Private Other	11% 86% 1%	<b>Language</b> Tshivenda Xitsonga Other	70% 26% 4%
<b>Language</b> Tshivenda (76.5 %) xiTsonga (23%) Other (0.5%)	76.5% 23% 0.5%	<b>Business sector</b> Accommodation Transport Hospitality Attraction Arts and culture Entertainment	42% 7% 19% 17% 14% 1%	<b>Position occupied</b> Manager Assistant manager Officer Junior	40% 20% 26.6% 13.4%
<b>Highest level of education</b> Tertiary qualifications Grade 12 No school	51.8% 32.3% 15.9%	<b>Size of business</b> Micro Small Medium	61% 34% 5%	<b>Highest level of education</b> Degree Diploma Grade 12	34% 46% 20%
		<b>Profit generated per month</b> Less than R10 000 Between R11 000 – R20 000 Between R21 000 – R30 000 Between R31 000 – R40 000 Between R41 000 – R50 000 Between R51 000 – R60 000 More than R60 000	26% 34% 21% 9% 8% 1% 1%		
		<b>Number of full-time employees</b> From 1 – 5 employees Between 6 – 15 employees Between 16 – 25 employees More than 25 employees	43% 49% 4% 4%		
		<b>Number of part-time employees</b> From 1 – 5 employees Between 6 – 15 employees Between 16 – 25 employees	82% 17% 1%		

Source: Authors' compilation

#### 4.2. The views and perspectives of the residents regarding tourism development

Overall, the community felt that tourism had a very positive impact on both the community as a whole and on the individuals in the community. It was clear from the results related to the effects of tourism that the community (See Table 3) (rated on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) that several positive effects are evident. That interaction between locals and visitors has increased ( $\bar{X}=4.00$ ), that residents are proud of their community because of tourism development ( $\bar{X}=3.98$ ), that entertain-

ment opportunities have increased ( $\bar{X}=3.93$ ), and that there are more opportunities for entrepreneurs because of the tourism development ( $\bar{X}=3.91$ ). Some negative effects were also visible, namely that tourism development led to an increase in the prices of some services and goods ( $\bar{X}=4.03$ ), increased levels of crime ( $\bar{X}=3.92$ ), as well as the increase in excessive drinking ( $\bar{X}=3.90$ ). Although the positive effects outweigh the negative effects, it is expected from the community that these effects will be taken care of. This could contribute to the development of negative attitudes towards tourists and tourism development and friction between the different stakeholders.

Table 3 | The effects of tourism on the residents

BECAUSE OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA:	Mean and standard deviation
<i><b>Towards positive effects</b></i>	
Interactions between locals and visitors have increased	<b>4.00 (±1.25)</b>
Residents have more pride in their community	<b>3.98 (±1.36)</b>
Entertainment opportunities have increased	<b>3.93 (±1.38)</b>
There are more opportunities for entrepreneurs	<b>3.91 (±1.29)</b>
Opportunities for local businesses have increased	3.87 (±1.34)
There are opportunities for people to have fun	3.86 (±1.24)
The rights of local residents have increased	3.85 (±1.23)
More people are aware of Vhembe as a destination	3.84 (±1.31)
The living standards of locals have improved	3.82 (±1.21)
The image of the city/town has improved	3.80 (±1.31)
The economy of the area has improved	3.80 (±1.28)
Trading in the area has increased	3.80 (±1.21)
The overall appearance of the area has improved	3.79 (±1.30)
More tourists visit this area	3.77 (±1.28)
Opportunities for shopping have increased	3.76 (±1.32)
The maintenance of public facilities has improved	3.75 (±1.29)
Infrastructure in the area has improved	3.75 (±1.23)
Litter in the area has decreased	3.71 (±1.28)
The turnover for local businesses has increased	3.71 (±1.31)
Public funding for community activities has increased	3.67 (±1.29)
Employment opportunities in the area have increased	3.62 (±1.52)
Parking availability in the area has increased	3.60 (±1.34)
<i><b>Towards negative effects</b></i>	
Prices of some goods and services have increased	<b>4.03 (±1.37)</b>
Incidents of crime have increased	<b>3.92 (±1.31)</b>
Excessive drinking and/or drug use has increased	<b>3.90 (±1.38)</b>
The overall cost of living has increased	3.87 (±1.29)
Damage to the environment has increased	3.82 (±1.29)
Disruptive behaviour has increased	3.79 (±1.24)
Noise levels in the area have increased	3.78 (±1.27)
Traffic congestion in the area has increased	3.77 (±1.30)
Residents get irritated with the number of people attending	3.72 (±1.39)

Source: Authors' compilation

#### 4.3. The views and perspective of tourism businesses

Attention was given to the perceptions of tourism businesses concerning tourism development in the Vhembe district. It was clear from the results related to these perceptions (See Table 4) (rated on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) that tourism development leads to more employment opportunities ( $\bar{X}=3.70$ ), the development of infrastructure

( $\bar{X}=3.61$ ), more economic gains ( $\bar{X}=3.61$ ), foreign currency ( $\bar{X}=3.48$ ) and assistance to growing businesses ( $\bar{X}=3.46$ ). On the other hand, the tourism businesses disagreed more that tourism development will cause inflation in prices of goods and services ( $\bar{X}=2.69$ ), it will cause pollution ( $\bar{X}=2.04$ ), that too many tourists will influence ease of access to local business ( $\bar{X}=1.97$ ) and that tourism will create chaos ( $\bar{X}=1.36$ ). Thus, very positive perceptions were noted.

Table 4 | Perceptions of businesses related to tourism development

PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT	Mean value and standard deviation
Through tourism development, more employment opportunities are created.	3.70 ( $\pm 0.52$ )
Tourism development will lead to an improvement of infrastructure.	3.61 ( $\pm 0.58$ )
Tourism development will lead to more economic gain for businesses in the area.	3.61 ( $\pm 0.56$ )
Tourism development will bring foreign currency into local businesses.	3.48 ( $\pm 0.77$ )
Tourism development will be of assistance in growing local businesses.	3.46 ( $\pm 0.84$ )
Tourism development will attract industries that complement local businesses.	3.38 ( $\pm 0.78$ )
Tourism development will make businesses in the area well-known nationally.	3.37 ( $\pm 0.74$ )
Tourism development will require technological upgrades in local businesses.	3.20 ( $\pm 0.75$ )
Too many tourists will increase traffic to the area	2.98 ( $\pm 0.97$ )
Tourism development will cause more competition among local businesses.	2.88 ( $\pm 0.82$ )
Tourism development will put pressure on local businesses to cater to the demands of tourists.	2.82 ( $\pm 0.90$ )
Municipalities' local economic development programmes assist in the marketing of local businesses in the areas.	2.81 ( $\pm 1.00$ )
Tourism development will cause price inflation of essential goods and services in the area.	2.69 ( $\pm 0.91$ )
Tourism development will cause pollution	2.04 ( $\pm 1.24$ )
Too many tourists will make it difficult for customers to access local businesses.	1.97 ( $\pm 1.15$ )
Tourism development will make the place very chaotic which may deter customers from coming to our businesses.	1.36 ( $\pm 1.04$ )

Source: Authors' compilation

#### 4.4. The views and perspectives of the government

Three themes were identified related to the roles and responsibilities of the government namely Relationships, The role of tourism in sustainable tourism development of the area and Towards a successful tourism industry.

##### Theme 1: Relationships

Participants indicated that the relationships between the government and the community are good. Participant 22 said '*... no development can happen without the buy-in of the communities, so the municipalities in the Vhembe district is in relationship with communities when it comes to tourism development because these communities are the ones that are living side-by-side with*

tourism activities'. Participant 6 agreed that *'It is good since we are working together with one vision of developing tourism in our area because without each other's support nothing will prosper.'*

Twenty-three participants indicated that communities are involved in planning, decision-making and development through public participation and municipal imbizos. One respondent said *'Whenever there are new projects we invite community for public participation and this eliminate unnecessary crisis since you get community buy-in and also reduce unnecessary expectations from members of communities.'* Three respondents indicated that they also use the IDP representative forums. Participant 19 said *'Through these IDP representative forums which consist of municipal officials, NGOs, community and other sector departments in the district we have managed to interact with communities on development agendas of the district. However, in other instances attendance is not satisfactorily even though the message is canvassed through sms, loud hailing, social networking, web-site notices, local radio and newspaper notices.'*

All participants unanimously cited the Local Economic Development strategy as one of the tools that they utilize to involve local communities in future planning. This strategy address, amongst others, the creation and strengthening of Local Tourism Associations (LTAs), establishment of youth forums, supporting the SMMEs in the region, job creation and sustainability of the tourism industry in the region. It is however important for awareness to be created around the strategy.

### *Theme 2: The role of tourism in the sustainable development of the area*

It was clear that the focus from the government's perspective was on the economic aspects of tourism. Almost all participants agreed that tourism provides economic benefits such as jobs, and business opportunities, promotes economic growth, creates economic stability, and is also a pillar of any economic development in the coun-

try. Participant 20 added: *'It is a panacea for the economic ills of any developing country in the world. In essence, tourism is a complex sector in accommodating people with different business.'*

The positive social effects of tourism were also highlighted by eight participants that indicated that tourism provides locals with education and promotion of culture and heritage through interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. It grants locals opportunities to showcase their cultural diversity. Apart from cultural promotion, education and exposure there was one participant who was concerned about the safety and security aspects of tourism. In his response, interviewee 8 indicated that: *"..having been located at close proximity with other African countries, as a result of people passing through the area on a daily basis criminal elements are possible to emerge. However, when tourism is booming, it allows government authorities to strengthen the safety and security measures in the area which in turn results in political stability in the area.'* Other possible environmental challenges were mentioned such as littering, traffic congestion, and overpopulation of tourist attractions, noise pollution, and vandalism of property. Participant 11 stated in her response that: *"Tourism involves more than a mere list of projects, it has a very strong strategic character, and it involves the process by which public, business and non-government partners work collectively to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation in pursuit of a better life for all in the Vhembe district."*

### *Theme 3: Towards a successful tourism industry*

Government participants indicated that one of the aspects to improve in the Vhembe district is the marketing of products by both businesses and municipalities. Other initiatives toward the development of the tourism industry included: Participant 1 – *'We need to consider having reduced municipal rates for small tourism establishments in the district'*; Participant 3 – *'there should be con-*

*tinuous training and workshops on financial management to assist businesses in being financially sustainable*'; Participant 4 – *'most of the accommodation establishments in the region are not graded and as a result of that it affects the daily operations of these businesses (supported by participant 9)*; Participant 11 – *'We need to develop tourism information brochures of the region and also assist these businesses with signage.'*

The participants were optimistic about the future of tourism in the region. This was supported by statements such as Participant 8 – *'Vhembe district has a potential for growth through partnership and cooperation with other stakeholders*'; Participant 9 – *"There is a lot of potential if heritage sites can be prioritized for development"*; and Participant 10 – *"Mmmm. . . .tourism will rise rapidly as more people are starting to be involved in this industry hoping to reap economic benefits that are projected from different sectors of tourism in the region."* It was however noted by participant 24 who stated that *"Tourism in our area is threatened by various things which in my view include things like lack of tourism business interest among the youth and also the destruction of natural resources in the area. We do have nature reserves in the area that experiences high volumes of poaching and firewood collection by members of the communities."* Clearly participants are positive but also cautious about the future development of tourism.

## 5. Discussion

From the results, the government, community and local businesses were identified as the major role-players contributing to the development of sustainable tourism. It was clear that all the stakeholders value collaboration, but perceptions of tourism development differ to a certain extent.

Firstly, the overall positive attitude of the community towards tourism is a positive notion with

the realisation of positive effects. Although high on the list of effects residents did not highlight the economic gains as a major expectation. This was also evident in the study conducted by Gursoy et al. (2019), that the economic effects of hotel corporate responsibility practices on community commitment are not significant. It is also interesting to note their positive responses amid no to limited tourism activities happening in the Vhembe region. A study done by Balsalobre-Lorente, Driha, Shahbaz and Sinha (2020); Bhattacharjee (2018); Ghulam-Rabbany et al. (2013); Lekaota (2018); Maret, Iwu, Musikavanhu and Handayani (2018); Nguyen, Suwanno, Thongma and Visuthismajarn (2018); Rasoolimanesh and Jafaar (2017); Tichaawa, Dayour, and Nunkoo (2023); and Vallabh, Maxongo and Aplén (2018) also noted the positive effects of tourism from a resident point of view. It might be that they realise the future value and believe that tourism will make a difference in the future. The social effects of tourism were more important which can be an indication of their expectations. Laitamaki et al. (2016) posit that social inclusion is critical to a sustainable tourism product since it contributes to the overall health of society, reducing crime and social conflict. The residents are ready for tourism activities but noted some negative effects. Yang et al. (2013), Nizic and Drpic (2013), Camus, Hikkerova and Sahut (2012) support this notion that tourism increases crime and prompts residents to indulge in heavy drinking of alcohol and excessive use of drugs. Tourism may lead to inflation of local prices of goods and services (Zuzana & Zuzana, 2015). This is because once a community becomes a tourist destination, the lives of residents in that community are affected by tourism activities which tend to be greater in developing countries due to huge differences in cultural and economic characteristics between residents and tourists (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013).

Secondly, tourism businesses also viewed tourism development in a positive light. The focus,

however, was more on economic gains such as employment and infrastructure development. These businesses are less concerned about the environment and other related aspects. Literature suggests that tourism contributes to economic development and job creation globally (Amalu, Otop, Duluora, Omeje, & Emeana, 2018; Begum et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2013; Rasoolimanesh & Jafaar, 2017; Rasoolimanesh, Ringle, Jafarr, & Ramayan, 2017; Yozukmaz et al., 2014). Furthermore, tourism development offers a significant contribution to the economic growth of a region through the supply of goods and services for tourist activities (Chirenje et al., 2013; Matiza & Oni, 2014; Pour, Egbali, & Nosrat, 2011; Van Breugel, 2013; Zaei & Zaei, 2013). This was supported by Brokaj (2014) that the tourism industry is the priority sector of local economic development and the core of the future local development in destinations. It was evident from the results of this research that through tourism development, more job opportunities are created thus, there is business growth and possible flow of foreign currency into local businesses. Though tourism stimulates new business enterprises (Zaei & Zaei, 2013), the results showed that few businesses operated for less than two years. Tourism supports the development of multi-sector or economic diversification (Egbali, Nosrat, Abbas, & Pour, 2011; Seyidov & Adomaitiene, 2016) but most tourism businesses in the Vhembe district were in the accommodation sub-sector, leaving growth opportunities. This finding concurs with Saarinen et al. (2014), who stated that there should be diversification of the tourism product with deeper involvement of local people in tourism. Aniah et al. (2009) argued that the private sector is more sensitive to the market than any other stakeholder and is interested in economic sustainability. Still, results showed that most tourism businesses' profit margin in the Vhembe district was R20 000.00 and less, which questions financial sustainability. Perceptions related to financial sustainability might differ between busi-

nesses.

Thirdly, from a government perspective, the community as a stakeholder was very important. Their activities are focused on the community and how to include them. However, the lack of examples and testimonies of previous success stories could not be given. The government see itself as playing a facilitating role rather than driving the tourism development process. Attention is given to developing policies and strategies, but it falls flat with implementation. Literature suggests that interest in tourism as a tool for regional economic development has grown dramatically over the past decades (Kim et al., 2013). Therefore, residents' involvement in tourism development to maintain industry sustainability and provides community development is vital (Mayaka et al., 2020; Saarinen, 2019; Saarinen, Moswete, Atlhopheng, & Hambira, 2020). However, Brokaj (2014:111) argued that effective planning and management of tourism at the destination level is challenging for local government entities. Brokaj (2014, p. 112) further posit that the tourism industry is the priority sector of local economic development in destinations and is the core of future local development. However, tourism development, especially in areas such as the Vhembe district does not seem to take flight.

## 6. Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to determine whether the effects of tourism are easing or straining tourism development by analysing three different stakeholder groups. It is evident from the results that tourism is a significant economic activity in the Vhembe district. Residents' perspectives highlighted the economic importance of tourism development in the Vhembe district. From the results, it is evident that tourism stakeholders are clearly focusing on different aspects which can ease or strain tourism development process. It can

be concluded that residents are interested in the socio-economic effects whereas tourism businesses are interested in the economic effects of tourism development. On the other hand, local government sees itself as a facilitator of the tourism development process. Given the different expectations of stakeholders, the overall perceptions of the effects of tourism are positive. However, some differences regarding the effects of tourism development which may hamper tourism development and collaboration have been noticed. Residents indicated that tourism development increase level of crime, inflation of prices of goods and services, and pollution whereas tourism businesses disagreed that development of tourism may cause pollution, chaos, and inflation of prices of goods and services in the area. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by affirming that tourism stakeholders still view tourism as a solution for development of poor rural areas with limited resources.

## 7. Recommendations

This study recommends that to ease tourism development in the Vhembe district, the positive attitudes of the residents should be utilised to establish a thriving tourism industry. More focus should be centred on nightlife activities where facilities such as shopping centres/malls' operational hours can be extended to reduce challenges such as traffic congestion and overpopulation of the tourist area. A variety of market segmentation strategies should be developed to appeal to tourists that are not interested in eco-tourism, nature-based and cultural tourism since most sections of tourism in the Vhembe region revolve around these forms of tourism. Tourism businesses should be encouraged to adapt to developments brought in by the Fourth Industrial Revolution through the provision of technological facilities such as access to internet through free Wi-Fi and use of different social

networking platforms to appeal to as many tourists as possible. Dumping sites should also be demarcated in the rural villages throughout the region to remedy issues relating to environmental problems such as pollution because of excessive littering in the areas. There should be a roll-out of decentralisation of business centres to the peripheral areas to reduce traffic congestion and overpopulation of tourist facilities during the peak tourism seasons. The government should develop a system to monitor statistics in terms of tourist visits and occupancy rates to enable municipalities to provide accurate figures, and this should be placed in all tourism establishments, both private- and public-owned. Municipalities should embark on an initiative to identify tourism ambassadors in different municipalities' wards which will assist in tourism promotion in the Vhembe district.

## 8. Limitations of the study

The study was limited because data was only collected from the Vhembe district. Given the topic of the research some of the residents needed guidance on some of the aspects in the questionnaire – the research process therefore took longer to complete. This was the first study of its kind conducted in the Vhembe district where three critical stakeholders were included in the research. This already shows commitment from the area and the relevant stakeholders.

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