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THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND THE TOURISM ACCOMMODATION SUBSECTOR: IMPACTS, SUGGESSTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of numerous crises that face Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME's) in the tourism-accommodation subsector. This study assessed the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism - accommodation Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME's), the response measures taken by the industry as well as provide innovative interventions for a more resilient subsector. A qualitative approach where in-depth interviews was conducted with managers in the subsector within the Soshanguve Township. Empirical findings indicated the pandemic severely disrupting tourism- accommodation SMME's operations, resulting in revenue loss, threat to employment security and increased debt. Innovative measures suggested included the introduction of mentorship and business advice, understanding of struggles, workshops and training as well as policies regarding the application for government relief funds. to be allocated to SMMEs in the tourism industry in the event of another pandemic.

Keywords:

Tourism, Accommodation, SMMEs, Pandemic, COVID-19, Innovation, Resilience

JEL Classification: L26, F20, M20

INTRODUCTION

The National Planning Commission (NPC), 2012 has identified tourism as a major strategic component in developing South Africa's economy. Adinolfi Jacobs and Tichaawa (2018) support this notion and state that in terms of South Africa's fiscal growth and transformation goals tourism remains a key engine. The travel and tourism sector has become a significant global industry since 1970 and it is growing at an exponential rate (Haque & Haque, 2018). International tourist arrivals increased to 1.5 billion, indicating a consecutive ten year growth, the numbers are forecasted to be 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2020; UN News, 2017). It is the biggest, multifaceted and most diverse of the world's industries using an extensive range of skills to facilitate direct and indirect earning prospects (Seghir, Mostefa, Abbes & Zakarya, 2015). In addition, the tourism sector is commended for its direct contribution of US\$2.3 trillion and 109 million jobs globally, and for contributing US\$7.6 trillion indirectly through stimulus in the year 2016 (Hlengwa & Thusi, 2018).

Similar to the tourism industry, the small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) sector is considered an important financial growth benefactor. Deborah, Wilhelmina, Oyelana and Ibrahim (2015) postulate that SMMEs are fundamental drivers of monetary growth, innovation and employment opportunities and play a crucial role in poverty alleviation. SMMEs are widely viewed as essential for creating new jobs, distributing current ones more evenly, and expanding South Africa (Razzaq & Wagas: 2023). In the same vein Thekkoote (2023) posits that SMEs are key tools for meeting the difficulties of job creation, sustainable economic development, equitable income distribution, and overall economic growth stimulation. SMEs have an exceptional ability to adapt to the country's economic conditions and market changes, which is crucial for national economic progress (Thekkoote, 2023).

Regardless of the benefits resulting from both the tourism sector and SMME's it is vital to note that the industry is not without its hurdles, in fact one of the defining characteristics of the tourism industry is the fact that it is highly vulnerable to risks. Crises such as world wars, economic meltdowns, COVID-19 etc. have and continue to contribute to the volatility of the industry. Small businesses in particular are more vulnerable to global crises because of their inadequate resources, and COVID-19 is having a particularly negative impact on them. These crises and their implications often cause catastrophic impacts particularly for emerging markets like South Africa as they depend heavily on tourism (Ritchie, 2009).

In recent years there has been a plethora of research when it comes to the area of tourism crises and management (Mair, Ritchie and Walters, 2016; Hall, 2011 and Ritchie, 2009), however very few studies address health related disasters especially in third world countries, particularly those relating to innovation for better resilience and sustainability of tourism SMME's. There remains a paucity in research relating to the indirect threat of health emergencies on tourism industries (Novelli, Gussing Burgess, Jones & Ritchie, 2018). Global pandemics have the power to expose a tourism company's readiness in dealing with crises both at a local and international level. It is beyond dispute that tourist organisations must be resilient in the face of crises and calamities. Nevertheless, little is understood about how these organisations develop resilience. It is from this backdrop that this paper thus recognises the

need to highlight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SMMEs with a specific focus on the tourism accommodation subsector in South Africa, more specifically Soshanguve. This study further suggests innovative interventions for resilience and sustainability of tourism accommodation SMME's.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impacts of COVID-19 on tourism SMME's

Due to increased globalisation, the ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has reverberated through every corner of the globe, causing loss of lives and jobs as well as a slump in general economic activities. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the tourism industry in South Africa, as it has throughout the rest of the world, in 2020. During this time, the tourism industry has been the hardest hit with many small tourism accommodation establishment closing down (Booyens, Rogerson, Rogerson and Baum, 2022). Undoubtedly, the severity of COVID-19 has altered South Africa's tourism, accommodation, and commercial aviation flow patterns. As the pandemic hit all industries, governments around the world tried to work around innovations and developed packages to assist all affected and all this were ideas created to assist which were never in place and in many instances some worked and others didn't. By the end of 2020, according to the World Travel and tourism Council (WTTC) 2020, COVID-19 resulted in the loss of more than 190 million jobs worldwide in the tourist industry and an estimated US\$3.4 trillion in global GDP. Other estimates, based on the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (Citation2020), show a massive global economic impact, with international tourist arrivals dropping by 78%, resulting in a loss of US\$ 1.2 trillion in tourism export revenues and 120 million direct tourism job losses. Sucheran (2022) undertook a study on economic impacts of COVID-19 and recovery measures the author found that one of the most immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on South African accommodation services is the disruption in financial flow caused by sudden company closures as a result of governmental lockdown restrictions and social distancing practices. The above discussion clearly supports the premise that accommodation SMME's are severely affected by significant disruptions, requiring a high degree of resilience.

Tourism Accommodation SMME's: resilience, innovation and sustainability

The term "resilience" refers to the ability to recover quickly and efficiently from interruptions Bryce, Ring, Ashby and Wardman (2020). Despite the fact that many studies have been conducted to study various strategies to utilize resilience potential, empirical and conceptual gaps persist. The empirical gap stems from the sort of organizations studied, where small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs) are frequently overlooked. Branicki, Sullivan-Taylor, and Livschitz, (2017), contend that that SMMEs lack resilience, and harnessing resilience capabilities is difficult; and that further empirical study on organizational resilience is required to explicate how SMMEs might deal with COVID-19 concerns. Strategic planning, insufficient financial resources, and informal HRM procedures are traits of small tourism businesses. Therefore, in comparison to huge enterprises, they could be more susceptible to market pressure and financial limitations (Jiang, Ritchie, and Verreynne, 2019). Companies that wish

to survive and thrive must build their resilience capability since it is critical to long-term sustainability when responding to unforeseen circumstances (Giancotti, M. and Mauro, M., 2020). In support of this authors Brown, Rovins, FeldmannJensen, Orchiston, and Johnston (2017) studied many types of resilience that influenced the accommodation sector, emphasizing the need of 'adapting, innovating, assessing, and ultimately overcoming possible disturbances'. Resilience incorporates a sense of creative and innovative ability to pivot and change business activity.

Innovation has emerged as a progressively critical element for the survival of SMME's as well as building up a competitive advantage over their competitors. (Arenhardt, de Oliveira Simonetto, and Oliveira Rodrigues, G.L.A.U.C.O., 2018; Domi, Keco, Capelleras, and Mehmeti, 2019). Innovativeness can take many different forms in the context of tourist SMEs, including creating effective strategies, inspiring staff to come up with original ideas, or just being receptive to change (Tajeddini, 2010). Nyathela-Sunday, Septoe, Menze, Banoobai-Anwar, Seager, Davids, and Buser, (2022) argue that a positive consequence of the COVID19 pandemic is that it forced small businesses to use technological innovations to increase convenience and reduce the number of close contacts that guests and workers were exposed to such as Self-monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology. In order to mitigate the anticipated negative impact of Covid-19 on struggling tourism enterprises (particularly more susceptible small firms) and their employees, South Africa implemented a number of innovative, fast deployed national economic programs and accompanying online application platforms. This indicating the crucial role of government policies in both the resilience and sustainability of SMME's

Government policies

Government policy responses play an important role in increasing the resilience of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises during crisis periods and creating a more inclusive and sustainable growth, International Trade Centre. (2020).. The first drawback is that because planning for resilience in tourism contexts is complicated, policies and programs relating to resilience must be determined from many institutional, economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental elements provided/influenced by the government Bhati, Upadhayaya, Sharma (2016). One of the main difficulties facing tourist policy maker/government is the proper selection and application of these policies. Blake and Sinclair (2003) state , when dealing with crises, government/tourism policymakers generally confront three significant obstacles (1) Assessing the crisis' scope and potential effects on the travel and tourist industry first (2) The length of the crisis, as different sorts of strategies may be necessary for dealing with long-term vs short-term disasters. (3) The decision to enact a policy. In their study on Covid-19 and government policies authors Estiri, Heidary Dahooie, and Skare (2022) argue that supportive policies by governments to help tourism SMEs enhance their resilience in the face of COVID-19 crisis can be beneficial if they are proportionate to key indicators of disaster management success. Moreover it is vital to use practical frameworks to assist local policymakers in implementing the most suitable policy responses during and after a disaster Estiri, Heidary Dahooie, and Skare (2022).

This discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Government policy influences SMME's innovation

H2: Government policy influences SMME's resilience

H4: Innovation that influences resilience

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant managers in the subsector to highlight the impacts of covid-19 as well as establish innovative actions, examine government policy to ensure the resilience and sustainability of tourism accommodation SMME's.

Research instrument

The interview guide comprised of eight questions and included questions such as "Elaborate on the impact of COVID19 on your employees"; "what you think the government should be doing differently to support small accommodation establishments" and "Do you think your establishment will still be in business post COVID-19? (Elaborate) for example. The research instrument went through the ethical clearance process at the Tshwane university of Technology and was granted clearance (REC Ref #: REC/2021/06/011 and Faculty Ref #: FCRE2021/FR/01/002-MS) before data collection as per the rules and regulations regarding conducting this type of research.

Research population, sample and procedure

The study was conducted in a Tshwane township. The department of treasury (2007) refers to townships as "underdeveloped, usually (but not only) urban, residential areas that during Apartheid were reserved for non-whites (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) who lived near or worked in areas that were designated 'white only'. The city of Tshwane (2015) insinuates that there are eight townships in the city namely (Atteridgeville, Soshanguve, Hammanskraal, Temba, Winterveld, Mabopane, Mamelodi and Ga-Rankuwa); from the eight townships, Soshanguve will be the focus due to proximity to researchers. The study followed a non-probability purposive sampling method as researchers relied on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the surveys. A sample of 15 SMMEs (managers and owners) from B&B and guesthouse sectors in an around Soshanguve. Only registered B&B and guesthouses were sampled, only personnel in managerial positions were interviewed. The sample excluded unregistered businesses. B&B's and guesthouses outside the above-mentioned townships were excluded in this study.

Interviews were conducted with 15 managers/owners of tourism SMME's in Soshanguve. Of the fifteen (15) respondents, seven (7) were interviewed face-face whilst the eight (8) were conducted through Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI). This approach allowed respondents to verbally convey and elaborate on their answers as opposed to merely writing them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents profile

The respondents interviewed were either managers or owners of their respective tourism SMMEs in Soshanguve, running B&Bs or guesthouses. The majority were above the age of 30. Most of the businesses had been operating since 2018 or 2019, with one starting operations in 2020, at the start of the pandemic.

The establishments provide accommodation to leisure and business travellers. Only one respondent specifically stated that they also host international guests. Another mentioned that they provided accommodation services to construction workers in and around the area before COVID-19. Two respondents had other businesses or guest houses in multiple provinces but was not part of the sample due to their geographic location.

Impacts of COVID-19 on SMME's

Regarding the impacts COVID-19 on the SMME's, the majority of respondents noted that their business was doing well prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a major impact in various ways. Table 1 below provides an elaboration on the impacts felt by SMME's.

Table 1: Impacts of COVID-19 on SMME's

Type of Impact	Severity of impact	Respondent's answer regarding the impact
Financial Impact	The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns enforced by government had a major negative financial impact on their accommodation and hospitality businesses in Soshanguve. As a result, many respondents had to loan money from friends, families or their banks in order to cover their running costs. Others, who were unable to access bank loans or financial assistance from government, had to use their personal or reserve funds to	<p><i>“Since COVID this business is dead, there's no business. It's not worth the property anymore, hence you see there's renovations. I am changing the building basically to student accommodations next year.” – IDI 8: Guesthouse, Soshanguve</i></p> <p><i>It has affected me big time. I don't want to lie, it wasn't easy. It was very hard to survive during the</i></p>

	run/maintain the business and/or to pay employees' salaries.	<i>COVID time. I am still trying to pick up from that because before COVID the business was okay and after the COVID, that is when things started falling apart.” – IDI 3: Guesthouse, Soshanguve</i>
Significant Reduction in Customers and rates	Respondents agreed that they experienced a significant reduction in the influx of customers staying at their establishments due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, as well as their own financial constraints and the fear of contracting the virus. This led to a loss in revenue and, consequently (in some cases), staff retrenchments. Several respondents noted that they reduced their accommodation rates in an attempt to attract guests, and mentioned that they have not been able to increase their rates since.	<i>“I was using the little that I had. There was nothing much I could do; like I said it was affected badly. I couldn't even have the FNB loan as I was using the little that I had.” – IDI 1: Guesthouse, Soshanguve</i>
Impact on Operations	The lockdown saw tourism establishments closing down completely and without guests and income. Consequently, staff were left without work, which led to regular operations and maintenance coming to a complete standstill for some. Once establishments were able to resume operations, they incurred additional expense of adhering to new sanitisation requirements, such as providing handwash, which many did not have the budget for.	<i>“COVID-19 has really affected the business in a really bad way, because during that time, we had to completely shut down. So there was no income at all at that particular moment and we had to stop our employees at that time until everything went back to normal, until around level 3. So basically we didn't have any income at that moment.” – IDI 5: Guesthouse, Soshanguve</i> <i>“It did affect them because most of them stopped performing the way they used to. I don't know whether it was because there was not enough income for them or</i>

		<p><i>maybe they just didn't have that energy ... but it did affect them because their performance was not good at all.</i></p> <p>– IDI 3: Guest House, Soshanguve</p>
<p>Inability to Continue with Maintenance or Renovations</p>	<p>Due to financial constraints, businesses battled to afford upkeep and maintenance on their establishments. A few respondents who started their businesses in 2019 and 2020 stated that they were in the process of renovating the building prior to the pandemic, and that lockdown restrictions had interfered with progress on these renovations. One respondent had been a victim of crime within the community, revealing that their establishment was robbed and that they have been struggling to recover from the loss, exacerbated by the financial constraints brought on by the pandemic</p>	<p><i>"It affected it in many ways. I didn't have anyone working at that time because we were closed for business due to the virus. People were afraid to come to our establishment and they were afraid of COVID also" – IDI 5: Guesthouse, Soshanguve</i></p>

While most respondents mentioned that they did not have to completely close the business down and were operational again after the lifting of level 5 lockdown restrictions, many are still battling to recover from the huge financial impact resulting from those restrictions. A few respondents noted that their customers have only now started returning and that business is picking up, but slowly.

Loss of revenue

According to Table 2 below, respondents indicated that they experienced a large loss in revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Respondents reported a total loss of between R50 000 to R500 000 in total since the start of the pandemic, with an average total loss of approximately R100 000.
- Two respondents reported losing R10 000 and R70 000 per month.
- One respondent reported that their revenue decreased from R4 million a year to less than R500 000 a year.

Table 2: **REVENUE LOSS**

Respondent	Revenue Loss
IDI1	+/-R300 000 since the start of COVID-19
IDI2	R500 000 since the start of COVID-19
IDI3	R50000 –R100 000 since the start of COVID-19
IDI4	R1 000 a day since the start of COVID-19
IDI5	-
IDI6	-
IDI7	Lost 70% of yearly revenue since the start of COVID-19
IDI8	From earning R5 000 a day prior to the pandemic to earning R600 a day since the start of COVID-19
IDI9	-
IDI10	R70000 a month since the start of COVID-19
IDI11	R100 000 since the start of COVID-19
IDI12	R10000 a month since the start of COVID-19
IDI13	R180 000 since the start of COVID-19
IDI14	R100 000 since the start of COVID-19
IDI15	R70 000 since the start of COVID-19

Many respondents reported that they had little to no income during lockdown and were only able to start a slow recovery once the government had reduced COVID-19 restrictions for the tourism and hospitality industries. However, many are still trying to recover from the impact of the loss of revenue. Respondents also mentioned that the loss in revenue had the following implications for their establishments:

- They have had to apply for credit or loans from their banks or even family members to try and recover losses.
- Reserve funds have been completely depleted to cover overheads, salaries, etc.
- Many are still struggling to maintain their establishments
- One respondent had started renovations prior to the pandemic and has still not been able to complete the project and have suffered approximately R300 000 in losses.

INNOVATIVE MEASURES

As part of the objectives of the study, it was paramount to investigate innovative measures that could be administered during future pandemics and below is the presentation of such measures from participants which varied from financial assistance, adjustment to the application for government incentives, infrastructure and maintenance, mentorship and business advice and understanding struggles.

Financial Assistance

Respondents mentioned a great need for financial assistance from the government should there be another pandemic that requires a total lockdown, so as to compensate SMMEs in the tourism and accommodation sector for the financial losses incurred. The vast majority of respondents cited that they are still struggling to recover financially and that they did not receive any support from government (with the exception of the two respondents already mentioned).

Respondents added that financial assistance for SMMEs in townships should be prioritised and that government should consider the needs of these businesses by suspending or reducing rates and taxes. Other respondents suggested that government assistance come in the form a long-term loan where SMMEs in the tourism and hospitality industry may borrow funds in order to recover from the negative financial impacts suffered due to pandemics and lockdowns.

“have something like a loan and say you are qualified for this much and then you can repay us as little as maybe R500 a month because our businesses are going to generate us our money back. I think it can work like that, if they can’t give us the money at least they can loan us.” –

IDI 1: Guest House, Soshanguve

“These people are all talk but no action; they give us advice on how to apply to get financial support but don’t provide us with financial support.” – IDI 4: Guest House, Soshanguve

Adjustment to the Application for Government Incentives

A few respondents mentioned that while the government did inform SMMEs in the tourism and hospitality industry about the criteria and submission process for accessing the Tourism Relief Fund, they should have done more to make the process easy and accessible for all. It was felt

that government did not do enough to support the tourism industry, since very few SMMEs received any financial support.

It was also noted that considerations and concessions should be made to allow SMMEs who meet up to 60% of the requirements to receive a portion of the COVID-19 relief funds to assist with paying salaries and building maintenance.

“They did their best when they told us to submit the documentation so that we can get something, but they should just minimise. They shouldn’t consider certain/all the requirements; some don’t have all the requirements that they need. But at least 60% of requirements, they should at least consider to help others.” – IDI 7: Guest House, Soshanguve

Infrastructure and Maintenance

There was also a need for government to support SMMEs in the tourism sector through better service delivery and infrastructure maintenance (e.g. maintaining roads and fixing potholes). Respondents also mentioned the need for items such as generators or solar panels and water tanks to assist businesses during times of loadshedding or water outages as they also view this as a pandemic. Another concern was an increase in the crime rate as a result of COVID-19 – SMMEs require assistance with crime prevention, which could be achieved by providing patrol services and increasing police visibility in townships in future pandemics.

Mentorship and Business Advice

Respondents mentioned that financial assistance could be provided in conjunction with business advice or even mentorship programmes, which would assist owners in the tourism industry to keep their business afloat during tough times as a form of resilience, as well as advise on the best ways to mitigate the risks of any future COVID-19-like pandemics. This would be particularly valuable to young entrepreneurs. These programmes could incorporate a marketing element, which could teach business owners how to promote their business beyond their immediate area. It was also mentioned that tourism officials should visit the establishments and assist with recommendations on how to improve ratings and grading.

Understanding of Struggles

Respondents noted that government needed to have a better understanding of the real-life struggles that SMMEs face, especially in townships. This would enable government to implement support and interventions that are relevant to the needs of the SMMEs. It was felt that business in township in the accommodation subsector which is the main focus of the study is not the same in other affluent areas in South Africa (i.e suburbs).

“No, honestly, I don’t want to lie. I stopped following whatever the government is saying or whatever is happening on the government side; I completely stopped. I didn’t get support from the government.”

– IDI 9: Guest House, Soshanguve

SUGGETIONS ON POLICY CHANGE

Respondents were asked to give suggestions for policies regarding government assistance to SMMEs during pandemics:

- There was a call for policies that would allow for grants to be allocated to SMMEs in the tourism industry in the event of another pandemic, which would assist them with covering running costs.
- Respondents highlighted a need to change government policies by ensuring that there is a reserve fund for township SMMEs within the tourism and accommodation industry to mitigate any further financial damage that may happen should further lockdown restrictions be imposed as a result of another global pandemic.
- It was also suggested that government allow establishments to operate at less than 50% to avoid a total shutdown in future.
- Respondents were also concerned about corruption and the mismanagement of government funds – it was felt that the tourism relief fund may have been mismanaged or unfairly allocated and thus a policy on the allocations of relief funds should be developed for future pandemics
- For many, the view was that government is more a source of frustration and stress as opposed to a source of assistance to the people due to cumbersome application processes for relief/funding, as well as poor feedback on applications and very few SMMEs actually receiving the funding applied for and thus a emergency call center with trained person in entrepreneurship should be established during future pandemics
- There was a call for SMME’s owners to have a say in how future pandemics are managed, particularly regarding policies and restrictions that can be put in place that would be in the best interest of the general public as well as the establishments.
- It was suggested that there should be a policy in place to assist SMMEs in the tourism industry to implement better coping/mitigation strategies in times of crisis. This could be done through providing educational material or workshops.

“We all know the country’s problem is fraud. If you stay in South Africa, the grants went to those who have the right connections.” – IDI 4: Guest House, Soshanguve

“They should at least have a meeting with us so we can decide together as businesses how can we partake in this and we help the country regarding whatever the pandemic that will be.”

– IDI 3: Guest House, Soshanguve

“To send someone to come in and teach us what must we do to prevent anything bad to happen.”

– IDI 2: Guest House, Soshanguve

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study found that, tourism businesses in Soshanguve were performing well prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, yet the pandemic had a major impact on their business, most notably due to lockdown restrictions which resulted in a huge reduction in customers and consequently, major financial losses. Many businesses had to resort to using personal or reserve funds to run/maintain the business and/or to pay employees' salaries, as they were unable to access bank loans or financial assistance from government. Most businesses are reportedly still battling to recover from the huge financial impact resulting from the pandemic and lockdown restrictions and it was noted that customers have only started returning recently.

The pandemic also had a notable negative impact on employees in the tourism industry as most businesses interviewed reported that they had no other choice but to reduce salaries due to the lack of income during lockdown. Many businesses had staff working on a rotational basis to cut down on salary expenses and to comply with lockdown regulations. There were also reports of retrenchments whilst there was also a significant increase on resignations due to fear of contracting Covid-19 and other resigned due to not receiving income.

A massive loss in revenue due to the pandemic and the impact of lockdown restrictions on the tourism sector was felt by the SMME's in Soshanguve with estimates of revenue loss that varied as reported. The loss in revenue resulted in owners attempting to secure loans, depleting personal/reserve funds and struggling to maintain their establishments. Most establishments were still battling to recover from the loss.

It can be concluded that, the majority of SMME's in the Soshanguve area (the sample involved in the research are not aware of the existence of associations and bodies such as BABASA (Bed and Breakfast Association South Africa), TBCSA (Tourism Business Council South Africa) and ASATA (Association of South African Travel Agents) as very few had heard of the TBCSA, but had had no association, communication or contact with them. As such, there is a need for increased visibility through advertising or directly contacting SMME's in the tourism and hospitality industry as well as the need to make business owners aware of how these associations work and how they may be of assistance to SMMEs in the tourism industry. An interest from respondents was picked regarding learning more about the tourism bodies or even fostering a more personal relationship with them.

Due to the fact that these associations or bodies are quite huge in SA, a suspicion could be drawn as to whether they are only interested in large establishments in lucrative areas than the townships and thus unaware of the struggles faced by the ordinary business owner or manager of a tourism establishment in the township. As per the findings, some respondents also had the perception that it is difficult/cumbersome to become a member of these bodies and even more so to get their establishments graded.

It is encouraged that, the associations conduct and manage workshops and training by actively going to all locations or townships, not only focusing on main towns and cities. An initiative regarding assistance to establishments with guidelines on how best to run a business in the tourism and hospitality industry and also for the these bodies or associations to go to the establishments and educate the employees and the owners on how to handle future pandemics or what may be done to mitigate the risks.

Whilst the tourism establishments in Soshanguve remain optimistic, the common sentiment is that, business will not be quite the same due to the financial losses suffered and the fact that tourism has been slow to pick up in the area as many are still operating with fewer staff members with others altering their business models and converting the guest houses into student accommodation and a spaza shop.

An emergency fund to cover expenses during the time when the business is not earning an income is strongly advised to SMME's and in addition, business owners should seek advice from fellow business owners or business advisors. There is thus a need for business education and network opportunities where business owners could collaborate to formulate solutions/mitigation strategies. Although government support for tourism SMME's remains the ultimate pillar for resilience and existence, more ideas still needs to be explored in order to prepare for future pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic has been studied extensively from a tourism perspective, however, more still needs to be done in terms of exploiting all avenues available regarding resilience in future pandemics as the industry is way too volatile to all external effects such as pandemics especially to SMME's

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