

# Sustainable tourism development activities and planning systems in Vhembe district, Limpopo province, South Africa: A comprehensive eco-touristic and sustainability perspective

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to examine Musina municipality's tourism development status and plans with existing documents and respondents' responses on their envisaged implications on tourism development and sustainability initiatives in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Surveys, interviews and focus group discussions, supplemented by field observation and document reviews, gray literature alongside published literature, were applied. Subsequently, Microsoft Excel and cross-tabulation analysis orchestrated the analysis of the data.

**Findings** – The policy and strategy aspects contributing to the previous and actual tourism statuses in Musina municipality are defined. The study concludes that Musina Municipality has rich tourism possibilities but lacks a better tourism strategy to empower local communities. Nonetheless, it dwells in the most tourism-based landscape within the Vhembe District of Limpopo.

**Originality/value** – Musina Municipality is one of the driest areas in the north of Limpopo Province in South Africa. It is also marked by impoverished rural communities. Studies on sustainable tourism and development have increased in recent years. However, rare studies specialize in synergies within various forms of tourism. Also, significant resources to advance local communities in rural areas are not sufficiently appreciated.

**Keywords** Limpopo province, Musina municipality, Musina town, Tourism plan, Integrated development planning, Service delivery, Ecotourism, Sustainable tourism strategy, Tourism enterprises, Public leadership, Sustainability

**Paper type** Research paper

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The author acknowledges the editors and anonymous reviewers for their advice and oversight of the manuscript. The prior eco-tourism management and environment and development certifications from the University of Pretoria Tourism Management Division and Centre for Environmental Studies bolstered this appropriate examination and are worth recognition. To this end, they essentially endorsed different environmental paradigms and biodiversity values for integrated livelihoods and sustainability. Rural development geography, urban and regional planning (URP), and public administration (PAD) credentials from the University of Venda-specific departments provided in-depth wisdom around settlement and industrial development and integrated development planning (IDP), strategic environmental and tourism management rationales, and sustainability implications, as did all research parties in the study area. SANSA Earth Observation is appreciated for the allocation of this study.



## 1. Introduction

Investment in the tourism industry is required, especially in rural and peripheral areas, as it is one of the government's top priorities (DEAT, 2000; Kirsten & Rogerson, 2002). As a result, these investments are crucial for empowering marginalized and historically disadvantaged individuals (HDIs) (May, 1998; Ali, Quaddus, Rabbane, & Shanka, 2022). Ecotourism is one distinct type of rural tourism that can strategically manifest in rural locales, consistent with Mafunzwaini (2006) and Mbaiwa (2012). Limpopo province has a wealth of potential for rural tourism. Rogerson and Rogerson (2020), who provide a case study of the overstrand local municipality in South Africa, remind us of the crucial role that municipal assets play in directing appropriate and inclusive tourism goods and strategies as well as ensuring the environmental sustainability of rural tourism and the flourishing hospitality sector in developing countries. Such investments are necessary for the survival of the communities in the Musina region (South Africa, 1996; Ramaano, 2022a, b; Madanaguli, Dhir, Joseph, Albishri, & Srivastava, 2023). Infrastructure, money, knowledge of international marketing and travel agencies are crucial for improving the tourist industry (Tecel, Katircioğlu, Taheri, & Bekun, 2020; Mango, Çolak, & Li, 2021). Akama and Kieti (2007) on the problems with using sustainable tourism for local socioeconomic development in Kenya. Hence, the Mombasa Resort Town case study echoes these particularized concerns. They identified a number of indisputable contributing factors, including inadequate external support, poor leadership of tourism enterprises and a lack of community involvement, which result in a lower contribution of the tourism sector to subsistence. Likewise, the Musina Tourism Plan (2006) was, in prior years, focused on enhancing tourism and integrated development plan (IDP) initiatives. To this end, and along with the relevance of this study, the IDP in South Africa was instituted in 2000 to improve the transformation of municipal development planning processes and enhance service delivery (Madzivhandila & Asha, 2012; Dlamini & Reddy, 2018). In light of these considerations and the ideals of IDP, constructive planning concepts have emerged as the primary references for fighting poverty through the provision of high-quality, everyday necessities, gender empowerment, public mentorship, environmental sustainability and the oversight and accountability of the government. Similarly, Nzimakwe (2011) posited that public leadership contributes to the accomplishment of larger national policy goals and plans as well as the enhancement of the environment, the economy, and the quality of life of people and communities. In light of this, ecotourism's capacity to empower communities regarding their indigenous rights (IR) and provide sustainability education is one of its standout characteristics as an ethical travel to natural areas that preserves the environment and enhances community well-being. The aforementioned create better planning system platforms around the usage of tourism-based local environmental resources, community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), community-based organizations (CBOs), traditional leaders and public leadership for enhanced livelihood and service delivery.

The current situation has been epitomized by protests within various socioeconomic activities, such as the study area's inadequate water service supply including the town, and by a lack of implementation of IDP ideals toward environmental sustainability, improved service delivery and enhanced livelihoods. In fact, one of the primary advantages of sustainable tourism is that it provides avenues for generating income through its ability to support the local economy. This could lead to, among other things, the majority of the communities having their own water reservoirs and boreholes inside their municipalities and milieus. However, previously, such buoyant IDP ambitions and designs, among other things, were to turn the Musina copper mine into a popular tourist destination, along with the integration of the surrounding biodiversity of adjacent entities like the Blouberg peaks. To this end, it has abundant natural and cultural resources. A recreation area and a local arts and crafts center were also envisioned as strategic approaches. Indeed, the visitor center in Musina town had never been a suitable location for travel-related companies, and there was also a plan to make it bigger. Regarding the aforementioned, the size of the tourism information center is regrettably

unchanged at least as far as the data-gathering stage is concerned. From now on, a focused place branding and rural-urban tourism integrated plan focused on sustainability can be employed to draw visitors, spur public service delivery, support livelihoods and manage facilities. There is a paucity of literature within the region that deals with livelihoods, sustainability, tourism development and the essence of IDP in service delivery. Thus, in order to improve the delivery of basic services, public leadership centered on tourism, and livelihood enhancement, this study aims to close the gap within the tending minimal conformance to IDP and local economic development (LED) operations in the study area with a suggested and envisioned model of sustainable tourism and sustainable community livelihoods that can be a benchmark for other biodiversity- and tourism-endowed rural municipalities.

Myers, Quintero, Smuts, Mlungwana, and Wiltshire (2016) and Tecel *et al.* (2020) suggested the need for appropriate instruments in the management and trade of tourism companies per the specifications. Kolawole and Mbaiwa (2013) consistently raised the possibility that tourism could support CBNRM efforts to improve livelihoods in the host districts while promoting biodiversity protection in developing countries like Botswana. To achieve this, CBNRM entails residents (the community) coming together to decide how to utilize and safeguard the natural resources on their shared land while creating tourism-based businesses and entrepreneurship (DEAT, 2003, p. 11). It improves gender equality, fosters public leadership in sustainability services and empowers women. Analogously, environmental-attached indigenous knowledge (IK) and customs that are passed down from one generation to the next are referred to as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Thus, together with CBNRM and IDP endeavors, they can complement ecotourism and agritourism offerings, especially in rural and peri-urban regions, with social impact assessment (SIA) and environmental impact assessment (EIA) justifications. With these in mind, as well as an empowering public policy and tourism development effort, social and indigenous entrepreneurial outlets like art crafts and the marketing of natural biodiversity items have alliances with the significance of tourism. Ultimately, aspects of the municipality's previous plan and anticipated strategy were conferred. The problem statement focuses on the complexities and lack of adequate clarity and consistency in the preceding agenda regarding the importance of biodiversity and the advancements tourism can bring through its growth and empowerment of the marginalized within the vicinity.

The main objective is to assess the state, success and potential implications of the tourism-directed IDP, CBNRM, LED and CBOs for enhanced community participation, service delivery, subsistence and sustainability, and also use the pre-existing tourism plan and IDP ideals as yardsticks. *RQ*: How can we create a clear and consistent local community development strategy (LCDS) in Musina municipality that is focused on tourism? Accordingly, this research makes the case that by assessing the municipality's primary tourism plans and strategies. One can have a baseline understanding of potential crucial elements. Consequently, it is to be integrated into existing and future tourism initiatives for sustainability and community welfare in the study region.

## 2. Theoretical bases and literature review

### 2.1 *The economic grounds for sustainable tourism products and sustainability*

The findings of this study support sustainability and the growth of sustainable tourism (Casais & Ferreira, 2023; Madanaguli *et al.*, 2023). To achieve sustainability, resources must be used and managed by the current generation without jeopardizing their ability to meet future requirements (Ramaano, 2008, 2021a, b). Etokakpan, Bekun, and Abubakar (2019) opined that most nations are working to achieve sustainable economic development. Agriculture and tourism are two of the many initiatives in developing economies that are concerned. As a result, there is a submerged cooperative connection between conservation and agricultural businesses. It does so within the parameters of both ecotourism and agritourism (Musina Municipality, IDPs, 2005, 2006, 2011,

2018, 2019). Hence, any agriculturally-oriented business or activity that attracts tourists to a farm or ranch is referred to as agritourism. It makes money for the farm while providing the guests with entertainment and education (Barbieri, Xu, Gil-Arroyo, & Rich, 2016; Arru, Furesi, Madau, & Pulina, 2021). As per Mohammed, Mahmoud, and Hinson (2023), the tourism industry generates diverse types of tourism, with horticulture being linked to vegetable gardens, flower gardens and horticulture farms. These activities yield immediate benefits like job creation, foreign exchange earnings, income generation, poverty alleviation and other profitable commercial ventures. Because of this, horti-tourism is a vital kind of agritourism that improves communities' quality of life in many rural areas. Suffice it to say that, when used sustainably, the relevant study area supports orchards and agricultural schemes that can sustain horticulture as well as agritourism. International organizations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have emphasized the necessity of the preservation and conservation of the natural world in a model that is economically, socioculturally and environmentally sustainable. Agritourism and ecotourism are therefore compatible with these efforts (Ramaano, 2022a).

### 2.2 The materiality of ecotourism for Musina tourism prospects liaised locally and abroad

Djuraeva *et al.* (2016) claim that ecotourism is a subset of nature-focused travel. To this end, ecotourism is a form of travel that encourages the delight of the outdoors while supporting environmental protection and conservation. The various climates in South Africa vary from tropical in the southeast to the desert. As a result, the landscape is diverse and includes everything from spectacular mountain to magnificent grass fields, including the coastline, meandering waterways and desert dunes in the interior. Wildlife is more multifarious than the well-known Big Five, and a sophisticated biological variety encourages it (Snyman, 2017). Thus, they possess the potential to be a catalyst for other development in the areas as a trendsetter. According to Mbaiwa (2005), the notion of sustainable tourism seeks to adjust and moderate matters of intergenerational equity and the ideals of environmental conservation, economic expansion and social fairness. However, using Kenya as a case study, Kieti *et al.* (2020) reminds us of the significance of maintaining balance between land use priorities to avoid conflicts among conservationists, tourism and traditional farming by native communities, and the best solution would be to seek coordination and synergetic utilization of the land for mutual benefit with the common goal of sustainability and livelihoods. One of the eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites in South Africa combines environmental and cultural elements, making it one of three all-natural sites. They incorporate the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, the Vredefort Dome, the iSimangaliso Wetland Park and the Cape Floral Region. One method to make tourism in rural regions sustainable is the ecotourism initiative. Additionally, Musina municipality offers a wide range of events. Thus, South Africa is setting the bar for one of the most audacious cross-border projects presently taking place in southern Africa in the creation of transfrontier parks (Ramaano, 2008, 2021a). So, in addition to ecotourism enterprises, Musina municipality can fully utilize and exploit agritourism. The Nwanedi community-based tourism-agrarian schemes and other rain-based cultivation lands are formal integrated rural businesses included in the activities.

Stone and Nyaupane (2014), from a Botswana viewpoint, argued that for sub-Saharan countries to successfully develop their tourism industries, the society in CBNRM needs to be reconsidered. In a related study, Chirozva (2017) conducted a study that highlights the potential of tourism pathways in enhancing rural economies through the lens of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. The study also reveals that community leaders can have a substantial impact on maximizing entrepreneurial opportunities in local ecotourism and cultural developments. To achieve this, Zanamwe, Gandiwa, Muboko, Kupika, and Mukamuri (2018) claim that businesses connected to ecotourism and wildlife conservation are powerful economic and political drivers that can inspire underprivileged rural communities to overcome

overwhelming adversity. However, the situation is caused by the overwhelming number of flimsy local organizations and ineffective system guidelines for properly allowing the residents; this is related to their Zimbabwe case study. Although some underdeveloped rural areas struggle to feed their residents and draw visitors, social and traditional entrepreneurs are essential in creating fresh ideas, organizations and businesses to see an opportunity for the region (Mottiar, Boluk, & Kline, 2018; Stone & Stone, 2020; Ali *et al.*, 2022; Quan-Baffour, 2023). The latter is consonant with Ringo's (2019) study of the desirable foothold IK has in Tanzanian cultural tourism endeavors. Similarly, the residents of Musina municipality can benefit from the area's rich biodiversity and variety of cultural materials.

### 3. Study area and methods

#### 3.1 Location and characteristics

Musina municipality is a subdivision of the Vhembe District municipality. It is found in the far "northeastern" part of the Limpopo Province, bordering Zimbabwe in the north and Mozambique in the east through the Kruger National Park. Musina Municipality occupies 289,393 ha and 28,936 square kilometers. Makhado Municipality occupies 831,058.64 ha and 8310.586 square kilometers. Accordingly, the Thulamela municipality is much smaller. The area has superior tourism potential (Musina Municipality, 2019). A link to Musina municipality map: <https://municipalities.co.za/map/1133/musina-local-municipality>. One of the top priorities of the previous IDP mission was to construct the tourist route connecting Mapungubwe National Park and Kruger National Park through Musina. Henceforth the adoption of its central position between the two parks (Kayamandi development services, 2007; Musina Municipality, 2018, 2019). At that time, it was also imperative to prioritize planting more baobab trees to improve the border town region. However, according to Ramaano (2021b, 2022a), such a scheme and many others never came to fruition. Given this, the plan also included building cultural villages to complement Musina Town's industrial structure and expanding the number of lodging options to support local and regional tourism companies. The analysis reveals that the municipality benefits from having plenty of tourism entities. They include Nwanedi Nature Reserve and a resort, Big Tree Nature Reserve and Big Tree Accommodation Lodge. However, Musina Town and Musina municipality continue to host further tourist draws. These include Mapungubwe National Park (MNP), Bush Babe, Baobab Caravan Park, Limpopo River Lodge and Mopani Bush Lodge within the Mapesu private game reserve, abutting Musina town and conjoining the MNP and World Heritage Site (Ramaano, 2008). The municipality is predominantly dry; the background has the mountain Fynbos, sacred forests and baobab trees. Conservancy areas include the Kruger National Park [Pafuri Gate], Musina and Nwanedi nature reserves (Musina Municipality, 2011, 2019).

#### 3.2 Data and methods

The techniques used in this study were intended to evaluate the Musina Municipality's tourism development status and strategies in the study area. The study employed a mixed-methods design using quantitative and qualitative surveys and gave an informative statement. Augmented by focus group discussions, the study applied document reviews, questionnaires and interviews as the fundamental research methods. The study employed purposive sampling. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample established on the characteristics of a population, also influenced by the objectives of the study (Ramaano, 2021a, 2022a). The sample size was calculated using Taro Yamane's formula,  $n = N/(1 + Ne^2)$ , Where  $n$  is the sample size,  $N$  is the population size, and  $e$  is the precision level. The presented study area, Folovhodwe, Gumela, Tshipise and Zwigodini villages in Musina municipality, has 4947 populations. Hence, as of Mane (1973), setting the sampling precision at 5% (i.e.  $e = 0.05$ ), the sample size of the study area was calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}n &= N / (1 + 4947 \times 0.05^2) \\n &= 4947 / (1 + 4947 \times 0.0025) \\&= 370.0766 \\&= 370\end{aligned}$$

As such, the sample size was about 370; thus, four villages were purposely selected and survey questionnaires were distributed accordingly ( $n = 370$ ). Four focus group discussions were further conducted within the selected four villages with up to five attendees ( $n = 20$ ). As mentioned above, all are close to various tourism ventures, such as the Nwanedi nature reserve and resort, the big tree holiday accommodation, Manalani Lodge, the Big Tree Nature Reserve and the Beria Madzonga Resort, including the Musina LED and Tourism Info. These six tourism ventures and entities engaged in six interviews with five interviewees per entity ( $n = 30$ ). The impoverishment and concerns of the communities nearby the preserved areas inspired the determination of the study area. Consequently, the selected localities are also adjacent to the protected areas, such as Luphephe Dam, Sagole Spa Hot Spring and the “Big Tree Nature Reserve,” amongst others.

As earlier hinted, the study was based mainly on document reviews, interviews, household surveys, focus groups and field observations. As per the core of the study, data were sourced using primary and secondary methods. Ultimately, data were collected through (1) reviews of existing documents (the municipality’s IDP and the Kayamandi development agency) (2) interviews ( $n = 30$ ), (3) questionnaires ( $n = 370$ ), (4) focus group discussions ( $n = 20$ ) and (5) field observations (field observations were conducted simultaneously with questionnaire surveys, interviews and focus group discussions between March 1 and June 15, 2019 extend to November 2023). Labeled authorities had different arrangements for meeting times; some preferred morning gatherings while others concluded afternoon slots. Moreover, the distance factor directed research sessions. Concerning the whole research process, nearby areas to the point of departure had morning slots, whereas afternoons catered to distant ones. Document review was implicitly directed at getting the main content of the study. Likewise, interviews, questionnaire surveys, focus group discussions and field surveys independently supplemented each other. Primary sources were the sources such as eyewitness accounts of the event, whereas secondary sources were one step removed from primary sources and did not include eyewitnesses (Esterberg, 2002). Also, Dillon and Murphy (2008) referred to secondary data as registered information made by other experts for pursuits other than the specific research need at hand. Ultimately, secondary data were the previously gathered data. Thus, for some projects, it was not extensively issued (Ramaano, 2021a, 2022a). For this research, the secondary data was primarily obtained from the Musina Municipality’s previous IDPs and LED strategies (LEDSs), among other sources; hence, it was reinforced by the unrestricted review of different kinds of literature. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses were utilized for the study. Thus, it used Microsoft excel, spreadsheets, cross-tabulation analysis and manual arrangement to focus group discussion data.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 *The demographics (gender and age groups) within the families in the study area*

The study area had 46% females and 54% males, which was uniform with Musina Municipality (2019). They are concentrated mostly in the 20–46 age category, which outbred other age groups by 50.8%. Thirty five (35%) of the responses overall are between the ages of 46 and 65. More than 21% of the respondents had completed some form of higher education, 33.7% had completed secondary school and 33.7% had completed elementary school, while 11.6% had never attempted any kind of official education. The size of the family ranged from 1–2 to 7+ members. Majority of

households (37.2%) contain 3–4 and 5–6 members, respectively, while 13.4% of respondents have households with 7+ members. Therefore, it is simpler to assist 11.6% of the respondents possessing 1–2 members against those with more ( $n = 370$ ) (Ramaano, 2021a). As a result, of the subsample and interview respondents ( $n = 30$ ), 13 (43%) were men and 17 (57%) were women. In the focus group discussion, there were 8 (40%) female participants and 12 (60%) male participants ( $n = 20$ ). Women were more prevalent in interviews with conservation and tourism organizations than in focus groups held in the communities (Ramaano, 2022a, 2023a, b). Through its dependable employment opportunities, tourism can empower people of both sexes. Additionally, it provides educational credentials for both age groups in the host areas when the right policies and execution strategies are used. Consequently, financial burdens on families of different sizes in rural regions can ease.

#### 4.2 Visualized tourism role-players within the tourism ventures and commodities

4.2.1 Respondents' responses on the environmental and tourism stakeholders (interested people): "who do you think should have a (major) desirable participation level in the promotion of sustainable tourism as an alternative and effective strategy for local community development in the study area?". Data in Table 1 show that 66.6% of respondents who participated in interviews chose a mix of local governments, nongovernmental organizations and CBOs that focus on rural and sustainable tourism. Consequently, 6.6% of respondents selected local communities and nongovernmental organizations ( $n = 30$ ), as opposed to responses to the combination of local communities and government (26.6%) ( $n = 370$ ). On April 8, 9 and 10, 2019, in the mornings and afternoons, key informant interviews were performed within the six sampled tourism ventures and entities. A similar dominant 85.0% of respondents from focus group discussions ( $n = 20$ ) collectively preferred a combination of local communities, government and non-governmental organizations that deal with rural and sustainable tourism as their choice, which is consistent with the quantitative data analysis shown in Table 1. As a result, the "others" category, which included local communities and government as well as local communities and nongovernmental organizations that work with rural and sustainable tourism, shared the spoil with a 5.0% representation each ( $n = 30$ ). Hence, along with the qualitative approach from the gathered data, the focus group responses were aired selectively (Ramaano, 2022a).

[...] A participant in Tshipise village was quoted as saying, "My friend, this thing is complicated." Although I don't know much about the essence of collaboration among stakeholders, I can tell you that there was a time when this village was a tourist magnet. And the spa was fully operational, with the locals enjoying all forms of social and economic benefits, so I can't explain what went wrong.

[...] A participant in Zwigodini said, "I worry too much about the damage done to the Big Tree within the reserve by the visitors, and I fear that one day this indigenous heritage will succumb to these abuses." "Hence I pray that whoever can come in should decently protect the tree and improve the reserve."

[...] A respondent in Folovhodwe village said, "Whichever combination comes in for the Nwanedi reserve and resort hub, local communities should have an audible voice, and we want tourism activities improved from what they are now." Hence, no quotation was aired in this regard, concerning Gumela village. Most often, the government or the government and the private sector jointly manage tourism-related activities such as nature reserves and resorts in remote and rural regions (Kirsten & Rogerson, 2002). As a result, local communities typically play a smaller part in the administration of such events. Where they tend to play a part is more of an act than reality, with much left to be desired, and the Big Tree Nature Reserve is the manifest epitome. Therefore, the communities believed they had a better chance by demanding extensive stakeholder involvement and much clearer representation. For this research, field observations of some of the projects and entities were conducted and tourism potential were manifest.

Interview Q10, who do you think should have a (major) desirable participation level in the promotion of sustainable tourism, as an alternative and effective strategy for local community development in the study area

Six tourism ventures and entities	Department of environmental affairs and tourism	Tourism officers at district level	Village government	Political leaders, e.g. Members of Parliament	Researchers and other professionals	Non-governmental Organizations dealing with rural and sustainable tourism	Respective community resources land owners and potential adjacent tourism ventures (owners)	A combination between local communities and non-governmental Organizations dealing with rural and sustainable tourism	A combination between local communities and non-governmental Organizations dealing with rural and sustainable tourism	Total
Beria Madzonga resort	Count 0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5 100.0%
Big tree holiday accommodation	Count 0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5 100.0%
Big tree nature reserve	Count 0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5 100.0%
LED & Tourism info center(Musina municipal offices)	Count 0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%	1 20.0%	5 100.0%
Manalani lodge	Count 0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 40.0%	0 0.0%	5 100.0%
Nwanedi nature reserve and resort	Count 0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%	1 20.0%	5 100.0%
Total	Count 0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	8 26.6%	2 6.6%	30 100.0%

Source(s): Interview by the Author, 2019

**Table 1.**  
Respondents' responses on the environmental and tourism stakeholders



In contrast, survey results from the locals indicate a similar reaction to ventures and entities. The three groups of respondents dominated. They included 13.5% of respondents in local communities and government and 19.7% in local communities and nongovernmental organizations working with rural and sustainable tourism ambitions. Nevertheless, 53.5% of those surveyed looked into a mix of governmental, nongovernmental, and local groups that support rural and sustainable tourism. Therefore, this is consistent with the answers from the industry's entities (n = 370). A review of the Musina IDP's documents between 1 March and 15 June 2019 and throughout 2022 revealed previous tourism plans, the state of the industry today and tourism-related obstacles, confirming the need for reforms in stakeholder cooperation. Likewise, field observations of some of the projects and entities were conducted, and tourism potential was manifest. There were physically viewed actual and potential tourism and hospitality infrastructure such as the Nwanedi nature reserve and resort next to Gumela and Folovhodwe villages, Sagole spa in Tshipise village, the big tree nature reserve and big tree holiday accommodation lodge and Beria Madzonga resort in Zwigodini and Madifha villages, Tshipako guest house and Vhengani's resort in Folovhodwe village, Tshipale Park and Resort in Tshipale village, Tshipise forever resort within the peri-urban area of Musina town, De Geb's resort (Gaba's) next to Folovhodwe and Zwigodini (in Muswodi village) and the baobab chalets in Musina town, amongst others. To this end, Folovhodwe river-based orchards and formal and rain-fed agricultural schemes within both Folovhodwe and Tshipise villages were dominant potential assets for sustainable agritourism, agroecotourism, and integrated developments in the locality. Alongside the mentioned were a variety of significant biodiversity and indigenous species such as marula, mopani, and baobabs that are valuable tourism catalysts in the area. In addition to these, a recently opened new N1 ring road in Musina town and the erection of a building around the area of the Musina tourism information center were viewed. It is harmonious with the Univen Smart City Model Symposium in September 2021 for Musina Makhado Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ) on the prospect of infrastructural advancement within the region. The latter could be the best strides towards strengthened tourism expansion efforts and could enhance the infrastructure development of the area, solve the traffic constraints on the South Africa-Zimbabwe border, and fuel the surge of border tourism in the vicinity. Ultimately, there could exist holistic tourism-based community advancement and sustainability ideals underpinned by various stakeholders within the area. (Field observations were conducted simultaneously with questionnaire surveys, interviews and focus group discussions between March 1 and June 15, 2019 [and extended to November 2023]).

## 5. Discussion

### *5.1 New tourism development endeavors and the improvement of existing structures and facilities*

At large and during the conducted interviews and focus group discussions, Manalani Lodge and Nwanedi Nature Reserve also showed some interest in forming partnerships to enhance rural tourism. This is quite fitting for these entities, as both of them are linked to areas where there has been some unsatisfactory running of tourism in terms of infrastructural development, service delivery, demand and supply. The Manalani Lodge is a substitute lodging facility adjacent to the once-renowned Sagole's accommodation within the village, which is now defunct. On the other hand, the Nwanedi nature reserve and resort have been subjected to a few changes in methods of running their services with invisible changes, and tourism profits the community. To this end, Tshipale Park and Resort has a manifest of new development at the medley of Folovhodwe, Tshikhudini, Tanda, and Tshipale villages and land tenure reform initiatives. However, the road systems in adjacent Folovhodwe and Gumela villages are unbearable and compromise tourism prosperity within the local enterprises and at the Nwanedi nature reserve and resort, further disrupting the influx of tourists to Musina town.

## 5.2 Tourism imports, prospects and turnaround recommendations

5.2.1 *Previous plans and enterprises associated with the musina IDPs and other potential tourism development-related feasibilities in Musina municipality.* Prior initiatives encouraged the collaboration and involvement of all local role-players to formulate an allotted tourism perspective. Thus, enhancing tourism operations in the area, also for creating a robust and well-established institutional structure to help drive tourism planning and implementation. In this regard, the enforcement of strategies and projects appears to be one of the most significant constraints preventing new opportunities from coming to fruition. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory geographic information systems (PGIS) approaches and IK in environmental management can reinforce community based natural resource management (CBNRM) corporations and public participation. Reinforcing the capacity and engagement of the Musina Limpopo Valley Tourism Association is still a challenge. There is also a need to construct linkages with the other spheres of the local economy about the specific interest market, such as the Ven mag mine (Folovhodwe), Venetia mine (Musina Town), former Messina (Musina) copper mine, Folovhodwe agricultural scheme, significant indigenous species and game farming enterprises, amongst other interests (Kayamandi development services, 2007; Musina Municipality, 2011, 2019; Ramaano, 2021a, 2022a). In line with the mentioned, some may have heritage tourism roles, while others may promote agritourism interests amongst other platforms. Hence, the prioritization of the enforcement of the effective demonstration of current attractions, areas, products and activities to offer tourists decent value for their expenditures. Thus, to convince them to remain within the study area and the setting for an extended time.

## 6. Conclusions and broad implications

### 6.1 *Conclusions and empirical implications*

Apart from the questionnaires and interviews, this study concentrated on the reviews of specific and relevant documents concerning Musina Municipality's tourism development issues, like innovative tourism route developments. The intended focus was more on the existing potential tourism routes and tourism development initiatives, especially tourism plans and management strategies, in the study area. Consonant to Ramaano (2021b), there was no evidence of a resounding development or tourism development policy that would forge tourism into desirable community development and natural resources management in the study area. The study comprehensively fulfilled its obligations through a thorough review of the IDP and LED scheme documents for Musina municipality. It revealed both previous and current tourism implications, focusing more on tourism development enterprises from Musina Town to the surrounding local communities. The mentioned was significant in especially mobilizing tourism routes and integrating Musina Town with other tourism routes. Hence, this would constitute the best strides toward boosting a potential tourism strategy. Thus, to advance the community's livelihoods through tourism in the study area, the data from all collection methods uniformly supported the combination of local communities, government agencies and non-governmental organizations dealing with rural and sustainable tourism as a potential desirable option for future improved tourism undertakings within the study area. Thus, neither satisfying evidence nor a turnaround strategy geared towards sustainable tourism initiatives within the local communities and traditional leaders existed (Ramaano, 2021a, c). It was prevalent that there was a fundamental need for a turnaround and an effective tourism development strategy. The strategy will dwell on the abundance of natural and cultural resources in the study area. It would be essential to the livelihoods of communities (Holden, Shiferaw, & Pender, 2004). The study has appraised rural areas as a better choice for tourism destinations, ranging from adventure, cultural, ethnic and ecotourism, among others. It has strengthened the possible way of incorporating tourism into the sustainable development of communities in the study area; specifically, the study provided a conducive environment and

platform for such an envisaged strategy from its findings and ensued recommendations. There had been studies that dealt with tourism and local people’s economies locally and globally. However, they remain inadequate to comprehend the lack of communities’ relevant expertise and their lack of participation therein, issues of incompatibility among organizations, the reluctance of stakeholders as well as cognizance about the significance of responsible eco-tourism as one alternative way for achieving a sustainable tourism mandate (Ramaano, 2022a; Juliana et al., 2023). That is so owing to studies dealing solely with one aspect or form of tourism at a time, compared to studying the synergistic power of tourism in LED.

6.2 Policy implications

In a nutshell, along with the earlier stipulated turnabout recommendations for the study, Figure 1 demonstrates the prospective theme of sustainable tourism and sustainable community livelihoods in the study area. It argues for practical and substantial adherence to



Figure 1. Researcher’s envisaged model of sustainable tourism and sustainable community livelihoods in the study area

Source(s): Authors’ own

sustainable tourism goals in the study area in terms of potential tourism development policy. It states that regulations and extension services, besides workshops and seminars, can boost tourism possibilities and community development in rural areas. Therefore, government and public leaders' workshops on sustainable tourism, livelihoods and service delivery are significant, and they shall be followed by researchers' workshops on local government officials, tourism entity owners and communities about issues of sustainability and livelihoods underpinning tourism development to validate the envisioned model. Thus, a tourism strategy should exhibit meaningful socio-economic, technical and environmental purposes in the study area. Tourism marketing, new route establishment, synergies within the sustainable tourism strategic business and the prioritization of geographic information systems (GIS), PGIS and remote sensing (RS) could be imperative. Thus, endorsing digital technology in information and communication technology (ICT) to promote local resources is necessary. The latter can work hand in hand with prospective data analytics for profound futuristic tourism resource modeling and management. It is consonant with [Myers et al. \(2016\)](#) advice on the demand for South Africa's integrated, web-based heritage management systems to improve cultural heritage management (CHM) and sustainable tourism development. Accordingly, [Mango et al. \(2021\)](#) established the same assertion that the web-based GIS standard with dynamic and interactive maps is crucial for managing and facilitating tourism interest in Tanzania. Indeed, in Southern Africa, numerous communities depend on natural resources. Ultimately, locating and monitoring tourism enterprises could be enhanced ([Ramaano, 2022a, b, f, g](#)). Thus, local communities' approval of a sustainable tourism strategy is tied to the nature of their awareness, privileges and perspectives on sustainable tourism. Akin to this study ambitions, though the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) was determined as South Africa's bold activities to engage in responsible tourism ambitions, [Spenceley \(2006\)](#) curiously scrutinizes its success in bringing jobs and spurring livelihoods to the adjacent local communities, with rather undesirable conclusions on residents' empowerment. However, the current study is optimistic. Given the biodiversity status and tourism potential of the area and the latest glimpse of infrastructure development, particularly around Musina town, this model can turn the tables around and draw a positive outcome. In actuality, the model and the strategy's appropriation could promote LED, degrade poverty and curb environmental degradation. Relatedly, [Ramukumba \(2012\)](#) investigated the local economic product of the Eden district municipality, Western Cape Province, South Africa, about the emerging entrepreneurs in the tourism industry and uncovered the importance of diverse arrangements of possible new tourism businesses and their values to the local communities' interests.

### *6.3 Theoretical implications, limitations and further studies*

Regarding the academic implication and contribution to the body of knowledge, the study showed that tourism could affect the community both directly and indirectly ([Sharma et al., 2021](#)). [Wyk \(2007\)](#) discovered the adoption of community-based tourism (CBT) for the commoners in Namaqualand. Hence, land reform solely for agriculture empowers less. With that, epitomize the potentiality of a gestalt of agro-tourism initiatives and other sustainable tourism measures in rural areas ([Spenceley, 2006](#); [Snyman, 2007](#); [Ramaano, 2022c, d, e](#)). Technically, the report supports the previously mentioned research, endorsing the tourism panacea and its leadership stature for general sustainability in the study region and possibly elsewhere ([Mbaiwa, 2012](#)). Despite this, the reliability of the results stood firm. Nonetheless, further studies may increase the sample size and utilize advanced quantitative analysis together with big data analytics on rural tourism within the region to deeply study the biodiversity, tourism development resources and modeling of current and potential tourism expansion within the district for environmental sustainability and livelihoods. The

aforesaid can be in accordance with IDP ambitions, CBNRM, CBT and the essence of public leadership, public participation and service delivery (Mbaiwa, 2012; Ramaano, 2021a, d, e). Eventually, sustainable, tourism-oriented local community development that enhances environmental sustainability and livelihoods can be achievable while symbolizing better public leadership and enhanced service delivery (Ramaano, 2023c, d). Therefore, this study maintains a *raison d'être* for the municipality's tourism management and strategies within the "management of environmental quality" and a fulcrum for prospects for the tourism industry for livelihood advancement in the study area.

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### Further reading

National Department of Tourism (2012), South Africa.

Vhembe District Municipality (2017), Limpopo Province, South Africa.

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