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## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF INFORMAL TRADING TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT- THE CASE STUDY OF TSHAKUMA FRUIT MARKET, LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA**

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### **Abstract**

*Since 1994 the informal trading sector has been growing in South Africa. Though defined as informal, and remaining largely unregulated, the sector has played, and continues to play, a significant role in creating jobs and enhancing the spirit of entrepreneurship in our country, besides helping many citizens to be financially self-reliant. The case study focuses on informal traders in the Tshakuma fruit market in Limpopo Province, South Africa, the main objective being to explore the nature and extent of the contribution of these traders to the development of tourism in the Venda District Municipality (VDM). The location of this market was considered of particular interest as a setting, not only because of Government's recent R 4.85 million intervention to boost economic growth in the area, but also because it is on the main tourist route to a primary national and international tourist attraction: the Kruger National Park. The*

*study employed a quantitative research method using questionnaires distributed to both traders and tourists and a thematic content data analysis. Study found tourism in the VDM to have expanded significantly in recent years particularly in the vicinity of the market. The findings indicate both the potential both for the informal trading market to be a pulling factor for the Kruger National Park and other tourist attractions in the area, and also to address the high rates of employment and insufficient incomes associated with poverty in our country.*

### **Keywords**

Tourism Development, Informal Trading, Market, Income, Tourists, Employment

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## **1. Introduction**

While 'informal sector' describes an area of economic activity that takes place outside formal institutional boundaries, the activities of traders in this sector can be said to remain within 'informal boundaries' for large segments of society (Webb, Bruton, Tihanyi & Ireland, 2013). Informal trading has become a way of life, not only globally, but in both rural and urban areas in South Africa and for both 'qualified' and 'unqualified' entrepreneurs. For many low income or subsistence/poverty level people it has become a way of generating their sole income and/or of making extra income. According to (Neves & Toit, 2013), almost half of all households in South Africa survive on informal trading and include the households of farm workers, domestic workers, street vendors, fruit marketers, and unemployed or underemployed slum dwellers. The current high levels of unemployment and job losses worldwide make informal trading a means of addressing low or poverty bread line income levels, especially in high poverty level areas. (Brown, Lyons & Dankoco, 2010), see the informal economy as the main source of urban jobs for the burgeoning urban poor and informal trading as relieving government of the burden of having to provide jobs and administering social grants. While informal trading takes place in both urban and rural areas, this paper's empirical evidence is obtained from informal trading and traders in a rural area. The principal objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore the contribution of a particular rural informal trading sector to tourism development in a particular area due to the nature of this extensive and intensive informal trading area: the Tshakuma fruit market.
- To identify and assess the contribution of informal trading to tourism development in the area.

- To explore the understanding and perceptions of these informal traders of their role in tourism as informal traders specifically in the Tshakuma fruit market and generally in tourism development in Vhembe District Municipality generally, and
- To determine the nature and quality of the relationship between tourists and informal traders.

Tshakuma was established in the VDM approximately 40 years ago and there are currently 300 – 400 women traders (Cardno Agrisystems Limited, 2008). The VDM is an area where rural tourism is highly active, and it offers a large number of cultural and natural heritage attractions and activities. Tshakuma is a stop along the Punda Maria road (R524) leading to the Kruger National park, one of the largest parks in the world and home to the ‘big five’ as well as to many endangered fauna and flora species. In terms of its location, the VDM is amongst the most highly attractive rural tourist destinations in South Africa, and the growth in tourism development in the area has incrementally attracted tourists, in turn making a significant impact on the Tshakuma informal trading area. Thus, one can argue that in the VDM informal traders are playing an increasingly important role in serving tourists passing through their area and are in this way indirectly and unofficially- or informally - becoming hosts to tourists.

However, in terms of research, a gap exists in knowledge of the nature and extent of the role that informal traders play in tourism and in the global and local economies, specifically in Limpopo Province. Most studies have so far focused mainly on the urban economy and its relationship to tourism. Rural areas have generally been perceived to be remote, with less economic development taking place, including a perceived dearth in the development of tourism in these areas.

## **2. Literature Review**

The authors of this article argue that the empowerment of informal traders has the potential to directly and/or indirectly attract tourists of various kinds and with different interests to an area and in this way to assist tourism development. Researching tourism and tourism activities and their place in, and contribution to, the economy, involves a multidisciplinary approach. The disciplines under which tourism falls include Economics, Geography, Sociology, Politics, Management, and History (Candela & Figini, 2012). At the same time, while it is now a given that informal trading contributes to alleviating poverty, it is important to note that it is difficult to monitor the sector, particularly as it remains both untaxed and unregulated, and

inadequately documented/researched. Thus, it is a complex and difficult task to monitor or quantify the extent of its contribution to the economy.

Locating studies on tourism involves not only searching amongst a number of academic disciplines, but also taking into account multiple perspectives. According to Nelson (2013), the concept has different meanings depending on the different perspectives and experiences of individuals who are both promoting and experiencing it, as well as for scholars researching the area. To understand the concept and its use requires investigating the history and background of tourism.

According to Du Preez (2008), tourism has developed over time and has been influenced by changes due to political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal and environmental factors. (Quinn, 2013) claims that tourism has recently become more interesting and appealing to governments, policy makers and researchers as well as to travellers because of developments in infrastructure and technology. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2009) has come up with a working definition of tourism as “simply persons staying out of their normal area of stay for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other reasons for travelling.” While for the purposes of this study this serves as a working general definition, the different types of tourism and tourism activities need to be unpacked in terms of how they impact on the growth of informal trading, with specific reference to the site of the case study documented in this article.

## **2.1 Types of Tourism**

There are many types and categories of tourism, some of which overlap. According to (Franklin, 2003), ‘tourism is everything and everything is tourism’. The main types of tourism relevant to this study, and to informal trading in a rural area, are described and discussed below. These types are relevant to the setting of the rural study area, and are the main forms of tourism popular in the VDM.

### **2.1.1 Adventure Tourism**

Many studies have concluded that tourism is one of the fastest growing commercial sectors in the world, and that adventure tourism is currently one of tourism’s fastest growing categories. Adventure tourism can be domestic or international and, like all travel, must include an overnight stay but not last longer than a year (Perdomo, 2014). A report by the (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2013) indicates that, as global tourism grows and tourists seek new

experiences and destinations for new adventurous activities, the adventure market continues to expand. The report further indicates that the value of the outbound adventure travel market for American and European tourists is estimated at \$263 billion. It is interesting to note that most of the outbound adventure tourism takes place in Africa (Webber, 2001).

(Mair & Sumner, 2017) see adventure tourism as a tourist activity which involves a trip in a remote area or one that includes a travel plan where unforeseen events can occur. According to Buckley, McDonald, Duan, Sun, & Chen, (2014), there is an increasing degree of homogeneity regarding adventure tourism, with participants travelling internationally to undertake the same or similar activities in different places. Rickly & Vidon, (2017) argue that adventure tourism is individualistic and subjective, yet also distinct from other types of tourism. Adventure tourism mostly takes place during festive seasons when the majority of workers are on vacation leave and during school recess at a time when families can arrange trips together.

### **2.1.2 Eco Tourism**

Eco-tourism is defined as responsible travelling to natural areas where the authorities are committed to conserving the environment, sustaining the well-being of the local people, and it usually involves interpretation and education (Sezgin & Gumus, 2016). Ecotourism can include both 'cultural' tourism or cross-cultural experiences, and nature tourism which in this case involves tourists assisting with conservation programs, a travel-learn experience, often in the process discovering how indigenous peoples are coping with modernity: a 'soft adventure' experience, and an experience benefiting the well-being of indigenous people. (Sezgin & Gumus, 2016) elaborate further on the nature of ecotourism as a type of tourism that does not drain resources. They argue that ecotourism is educational, adventurous, and focuses on understanding and on under-visited natural, cultural and historic areas with precise, detailed and responsible understanding and appreciation of the natural beauty and social culture of the area of interest.

### **2.1.3 Cultural Tourism**

(Rahman, 2012) sees cultural tourism as referred to the traditions, customs, religion, ceremonies, rituals, arts, crafts, language, dress, food, architecture and landscaping of a group of people or peoples in a particular area. It is the subset of tourism which deals with tourists' involvement in, and appreciation of, the lifestyle of people of a historical and/or geographical area and other aspects that shape, or have shaped, their way of life such as art, architecture and religion/beliefs. The general perception of cultural tourism on the part of researchers and

stakeholders is of it being an important driver of the tourism industry, and authorities endeavour to exploit this potential by fostering cultural activity to attract cultural tourists to their respective countries (Borowiecki & Castiglione, 2014).

#### **2.1.4 Heritage Tourism**

This is related to cultural tourism. According to the global heritage tourism organisation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), heritage tourism involves traveling to experience the places, artefacts and activities that authentically represent the stories of people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic, and natural resources. Heritage tourism is a branch of tourism geared toward, and developing and preserving the infrastructure in, the location or geographical area or people where this kind of tourism occurs (Mcmorran, 2017). The VDM, with its rich heritage and cultural sites, is one of the areas where this type of tourism enjoys much support and attention from tourists from near and far, particularly because of the heritage and history of the Vha-Venda people preserved in the district.

#### **2.1.5 Educational Tourism**

Historically travel for education and learning in addition to travel as a practice confirming the status and power of the aristocratic and/or wealthy class has, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, been an important motive for travelling/touring, and many tourism activities were in their initial phase responses to tourists' curiosity (Abubakar, Shneikat & Oday, 2014). (Sharma, 2015) argues that in recent times educational tourism has come to involve tourists traveling to a destination as a group – often with an informed guide - with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience directly related to the destination. The VDM can be said to be one of the areas to which tourists travel to study the unique nature and history of this district and its peoples.

#### **2.2 Informal Trading**

In order to assess how these different types of tourism occurring in the VDM, their impact on informal trading in the area under study, and how informal traders in turn influence tourists and the attraction of tourists to the fruit market, it is necessary to explore the concept of informal trading in more detail, including the fact that informal traders have, in spite of some arguments and perceptions to the contrary, become a permanent feature of the economic landscape, particularly in developing countries.

(Lyons & Snoxell, 2005) see informal trading as including any or all of the following forms of trading: street trading, which comprises the selling of goods or supply of services for reward or remuneration on a public road; the selling of goods in a designated area; the sale of goods or services in a public place; mobile trading, such as trading from caravans and light motor vehicles; the selling of goods in stalls or kiosks; and the selling of goods at special events. Informal traders who conduct enterprises in developing countries are often thought of as responding to rigid and cumbersome market regulations (Bengtsson, 2015). (Skinner, 2008) contends that, despite advances in modern development retailing, millions of people throughout the world continue to make their living partly or wholly selling goods and services on the street. (Bonner & Spooner, 2011) argue that the idea of informal traders as a transitory phenomenon that will disappear over time through formalisation has largely been dispelled. The research documented in this article focused on the role of informal traders precisely because the sector persists and dominates trading in rural areas including the area in which the Tshakuma fruit market is situated. The literature reviewed clearly describes and depicts informal traders in a way that aligns with the informal trading activities in the Tshakuma fruit market.

### **2.3 Contributions and roles of informal traders to tourism development**

In many tourism destinations informal economic activities are of considerable importance to the health of an area's economy and that of the country as a whole, as well as to the welfare of its citizens, particularly those living at subsistence level. However, according to the literature reviewed, besides reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale of operation, labour intensiveness, skills acquired outside formal education systems, part-time labour and being locally-based ventures, characteristics of the informal sector generally include lack of legal recognition and registration, evasion of taxes, ease of entry and unregulated and competitive markets (Timothy, 1995).

The embedment of street vending in its local context is essential to understanding the dynamics and economic impact on tourism of the street vending scene in VDM. Although tourism is often a small part of a street vendor's livelihood, the influence of tourism on the livelihood of street vendors is considerable (Roos, 2016). In this context, (Gunn, 1988), as quoted by (Wilson Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier & Van Es, 2001), saw tourism development as involving, (1) attractions in the form of the natural and manmade features both within and adjacent to a community; (2) promotion: the marketing of the area's tourism attractions to potential tourists;

(3) good tourism infrastructure: access facilities (roads, airport, trains and buses), water and power (4) services: accommodation, restaurants, and the various retail businesses needed to take care of tourists' needs and (5) hospitality: how tourists are treated by both community residents and those employed in the tourism business and in the area's attractions. Tourism development benefits the destinations where such developments are in place (Yoon, Gursoy, & Chen, 2001). (Twining & Butler, 2002) listed the indicators associated with tourism development as stipulated by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNTWO):

1. Site protection: category of site protection according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
2. Stress tourist numbers visiting a site (per annum/peak month).
3. Use intensity in peak periods (persons per hectare).
4. Social impact: ratio of tourists to locals (peak period and over time).
5. Development control: existence of environmental review procedure or formal site controls.
6. Waste management: percentage of sewage from site receiving treatment.
7. Planning process: existence of organised regional plan for tourism.
8. Critical ecosystems, number of rare/endangered species.
9. Consumer satisfaction: level of satisfaction of visitors.
10. Local satisfaction: level of satisfaction of locals.
11. Tourism contribution to the local economy: proportion of total economic activity generated by tourism.

### **3. Methodology**

(Fischler, 2010) describes the ways in which quantitative research provides a researcher the opportunity to collect quantifiable data from participants, to analyse these using statistics, and to conclude the enquiry with limited biasness objective a manner as possible. A quantitative method was employed in this study, due to the fact that the study is descriptive in nature. Given that quantitative research answers questions on relationships with measurable variables in order to explain, predict and control phenomena (Perumal, 2014), the method was used to explore the relationship between informal trading and the development of tourism in the area chosen for the



site of the study, and to test whether, and to what extent, informal trading has been making, and continues to make, a contribution to tourism development in the area.

The data for the study were collected using questionnaires distributed to 50 informal traders and 50 tourists. The study employed a non-probability sampling technique which allows the researcher to have control over the selection process and allows inclusion of the most relevant participants (Tansey, 2007). The rationale for using this sampling technique was that the study focusses on a field with many areas and with a large population. Non-probability was paired with purposive sampling, the latter sampling technique assisting the researchers in avoiding tensions and conflict between researchers and respondents, and amongst respondents, especially conflicts which could develop between informal traders likely to fight over participation in this study.

The data analysis process was informed by a thematic content analysis technique. (Alhojailan & Ibrahim, 2012) describe thematic analysis as the most appropriate analysis technique for studies that seek to explore phenomena using interpretation. These authors add that a thematic analysis provides a systematic element of data analysis. Thus, using this analysis technique, the researchers were able to synthesise responses in the questionnaires, and a 'scissor and sort' technique was used to consolidate data into chunks; unnecessary data was discarded. Thereafter, themes emerged and were developed for data analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS 20.0.

#### **4. Results of the data analysis**

The results show most of the 90 % of the 50 sampled informal trader participants resided within a 10 km radius of the Tshakuma fruit market, and about 40% of the respondents had spent six or more as informal traders at the market. Only 4% of the respondents had spent less than a year engaged in informal business. Most traders indicated their having had a starting phase of between 1-5 years prior to the conducting of the study. The researchers concluded that this could have been influenced by recent developments around the VDM, including the construction of a new mall (Thavhani Mall) in the nearby town of Thohoyandou, together with the annual Heritage Royal music festival that takes place at Nandoni Dam and many other developments in the VDM area. The market products sold by the informal traders in the Tshakuma were predominately raw materials, the majority of the informal traders selling vegetables and fruit.

The key factor influencing the market products sold by the population of, and participants in, the study, and living in the area, is that the area is predominantly an agriculture and farming area.

#### **4.1 Reasons for choosing informal trade**

As has been noted, informal trade is a sector that is not reliable or protected by regulations because it takes place outside the formal parameters of business. In spite of the fact that the formal sector carries less risk for traders and business people, and operates within the formal parameters of the majority of business people in the rural areas of VDM, we chose the informal sector for various reasons, ranging from lack of employment in the area of study, and the ease with which it was possible to access the informal sector and the traders within it – besides wanting to fill a gap in this particular area of research. This study presents an exploration of the reasons for the involvement of the respondents in informal trading, especially those reasons concerning what these traders need the money generated in the business for. The majority of respondents indicated that at the time of the study they were involved in informal trade because it was their primary source of finance and livelihood. The percentage of respondents who indicated they were using the profit and revenue from the informal trade to support their families was 68%. Twenty-two percent of the informal traders were using the income generated as a secondary source to support their families. Only 6% of the respondents were employed in the formal sector and their primary reason for engaging in informal trade was that they were employed by a formal trader to sell the trader's goods in the informal sector. However, there were two respondents who had other reasons: one indicated that she wanted to grow the business, thus saving revenue generated in order to grow her capital and start a big business; the other respondent indicated that she was not a serious trader, but only selling "for fun".

#### **4.2 Views of the informal traders on their role in tourism development**

This study afforded the respondents (informal traders) an opportunity to present their views on whether they considered themselves to be making a contribution towards tourism development in the VDM. The majority of respondents indicated that they felt positive about their role in tourism development in the area. The informal traders at the market are the group of traders that interact with tourists more often and more directly than traders in the formal sector. In addition, tourists tend to want to interact with informal traders, and to enjoy such 'authentic'

interactions, when buying products from them. Thus, this study has found informal traders to be playing an important role in the attraction of tourists to tourism destinations in VDM.

#### **4.3 Tourists' feedback**

The results of the data analysis from the tourists' questionnaire show that the majority of the tourists visiting the VDM area and its surroundings at the time of study were from South Africa (local tourists). The study also revealed that 22% of the tourist respondents were nationals in the SADC region, and 8% were from other African countries outside the SADC region. An interesting finding is that in the VDM study area there were tourists from European countries such as Germany, indicating that the tourism industry under study attracts tourists from all over the world. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, other studies have shown the tourism sector to be one of fastest growing industries in the country and globally and the movement of people involved in tourism globally to be far reaching. The results specify the significant number of tourists in the sample who were from outside South Africa. There is also an indication that the rural areas of Limpopo Province and VDM have the potential and infrastructural quality to host international tourists with confidence, although we observed that there was room for infrastructural improvement in the market itself. Importantly, the site of the study includes the road leading tourists to one of the biggest global tourism destinations/attractions: the Kruger National Park, which attracts tourists from the USA, the UK, Europe, Asia, and many other countries.

#### **4.4 Tourists' product preferences**

The majority of the tourist respondents indicated that the product they most preferred to buy from informal traders in the market was fruit. However, as the study has indicated, the study area is situated at the centre of agriculture and farming, and thus there was also a significant number of respondents buying vegetables, 14 respondents indicating that they preferred vegetables when travelling. It is also important to indicate that the prices of these products are relatively low in comparison to those on offer in the formal sector. The results show a total of 23 respondents indicating their preference for buying fruit from informal traders, and this finding corresponds to the findings from the informal trader respondents, the majority of whom indicated that they were selling fruit. These results show an important aspect emerging from the responses from the informal trader respondents: they appear to have an acute understanding and assessment of the needs of the consumers and of market demands. The informal trading fast food business in

the area outside of the fruit market was also shown to be thriving: a total of 13 tourist respondents indicated that they preferred fast food from the informal traders over that sold in the formal sector.

#### **4.5 Contribution of informal traders to tourism development in the area**

The main aim of this research was to explore and determine the extent of the contribution of informal traders to tourism development in the VDM area, with a specific focus on the Tshakuma fruit market. The findings revealed informal trading to be playing an important role in tourism development in the area. The literature reviewed showed many studies indicating that, both globally and locally, informal traders constitute one of the primary factors attracting tourists to an area. Although the researchers found a small number of studies done on the specifics of the role and contribution of informal traders in tourism development in urban areas, the literature review revealed a lack of studies focusing specifically on the relationship between informal traders and tourism development in rural areas. This study focused on a rural area in a developing country. The results clearly indicate a positive contribution of informal traders towards tourism development in the area which was the setting of the case study. The responses from tourists indicated that part of the attraction of the particular tourism destination under study was the opportunity to buy from- and interact with - informal traders. The informal traders indicated that they saw themselves as playing an important role in tourism development, especially in the attraction of tourists to a tourism destination such as the VDM and its surroundings. All 50 informal trader respondents indicated this perception regarding their role as a sector through the services and products that they sell to tourists. They saw themselves as enhancing the experience and enjoyment of the destination for tourists.

### **5. Discussion of findings**

#### **5.1 Contribution of informal traders to tourism**

The results of the data analysis presented in chapter four show the considerable importance of having informal traders selling different kinds of products along the Punda Maria road to tourists travelling to and around the different destinations of the Vhembe District Municipality.

#### **5.2 To identify tourism development**

As has been noted, the tourists visiting the VDM and its surrounds contribute to a growth in the economy of the local area since they generate revenue for the traders by buying different

kinds of products, fruit in particular. In addition, while they are travelling around VDM, they engage in and spend money on a variety of other tourist activities (see section 2: 2.1.1 – 2.1.5 above).

### **5.3 Understanding the contribution that informal traders in general make to tourism development**

The authors of this article consider this study to have the potential to increase awareness of stakeholders of the importance of the role informal trade, which, although not monitored or regulated, plays in the development of tourism. The responses from the informal traders in the study's sample indicate that they consider their contribution to be one of the important factors in developing tourism in their area. This is reinforced by the very positive and insightful responses of the majority of the informal trader respondents regarding the role they see themselves playing in this development.

### **5.4 The relationship between informal traders and tourists**

The findings show a significant mutually beneficial relationship between tourists and informal traders in the Vhembe District Municipality. The informal traders help to attract tourists to the various tourist destinations/attractions around the district and, *en route* to their destinations, tourists are able to buy a variety of products with minimum inconvenience from informal traders. In addition, as the results presented in section four show, the mutually beneficial relationship existing between traders and tourists indicates that tourists feel happy with the service informal traders are providing and likewise the informal traders feel positive about serving different kinds of tourists.

## **6. Conclusion**

This case study was aimed at determining the reality and extent of the contribution of informal traders to tourism development in the VDM area of Limpopo province. Findings clearly show these traders, by attracting tourists to the VDM, are playing a significant role in boosting the economy of the area. Moreover, the exploration of the relationship between informal traders and tourists showed a mutually advantageous relationship between them: they are afforded an opportunity to interact in a natural and informal way with each other during the process of buying the products on offer in the fruit market.

While informal trading was found to play a central role in serving tourists and thus in tourism development in the VDM, the findings suggest some degree of formalisation of the

informal trading sector has the potential to make its contribution to the industry and the area's economy even more substantial. The R 4.85 million government contribution to the VDM area from the Department of Small Business Development through the Shared Economic Infrastructure Facility is a government intervention to assist small informal businesses and to boost economic growth in the area (Makhado Local Economic Development Strategy, 2010), and an indication of our government's confidence in the economic potential both of the area and of the informal traders operating there.

One of the recommendations arising from the study was that there should be a direct link between this fruit market and other tourist attractions in the area, besides the Kruger National Park. This can be done through development of tourist routes and/or packages that include the informal Tshakuma fruit market as a tourist attraction in its own right. The other direct link which could be created between tourism and this market would be the offering of training and skills to informal traders on how best to interact with tourists: according to the findings tourists form the largest percentage of their customers. This training should be geared to enhancing the approach of informal traders to tourists.

This particular informal fruit market has not only contributed to the material and quantifiable contribution of tourism development but has also gone a long way towards maturing tourism growth and to increasing the positive perceptions of each of the two groups of study respondents. This contribution could also be seen in terms of the tourists' valuable contribution to, or boosting of, the businesses of the informal traders by willingly stopping and buying from them. Thus, tourism marketing needs to find creative and innovative ways of encouraging them to do so.

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