

COVID-19 and the Implementation of South Africa's National Development Plan 2030: Insights from Vhembe District Municipality

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Abstract

This paper sought to evaluate the impact of Corona virus (COVID-19) on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 in the Vhembe District Municipality. The National Development Plan (NDP) is a plan for South Africa to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030 through uniting South Africans, unleashing the energies of its citizens, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capability of the state and leaders working together to solve complex problems. The approach of the Plan revolves around citizens being active in development, a capable and developmental state able to intervene to correct the historical inequalities, and strong leadership throughout society by working together to solve the problems. The Plan addresses the need to enhance the capabilities of the people so that they can live the lives that they desire; and to develop the capabilities of the state so that it can grow faster, draw more people into work and raise living standards for all, particularly the poor. This paper investigates whether COVID-19 pandemic has done significant harm to an already bruised economy, or if it has enhanced the implementation of the Plan. The paper used a mixed research methodology in which both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used. To achieve the objective of the study, non-probability sampling and its subtype, purposive sampling method, were used to get an appropriate sample.

Key Words: Local Government, COVID-19, National Development Plan, Policy Implementation.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the state of coronavirus commonly known as COVID-19 at Vhembe District Municipality in Limpopo province, South Africa, with specific reference to the implementation of the NDP 2030. The NDP aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. According to the National Planning Commission (NPC) (2012, p.18), South Africa can realise these goals by drawing on the energies of its people, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capacity of the state, and promoting leadership and partnerships throughout society. This paper investigates whether COVID-19 enhanced or worsened the implementation of the NDP 2030 regarding the goals and the objectives of the Plan. According to the National Planning Commission (2013), the NDP 2030 is about transformation and contains recommendations to achieve a virtuous cycle of confidence and trust, a growing economy and broadening of opportunities. NDP deals with implementing redress, promoting economic and social inclusion, social cohesion, active citizenry and broad-based leadership and the crafting of a social compact (Van der Waldt & Prinsloo, 2019).

Background

South Africa's transition from apartheid to a democratic state has been a success. In the past thirty years, South Africa has built democratic institutions, transformed the public service, extended basic services, stabilised the economy and taken its rightful place in the family of nations (Ogbeidi, 2012, p.32). Ogbeidi (2012) claims that in nearly every facet of life, advances are being made in building an inclusive society, rolling back the shadow of history and broadening opportunities for all. South Africa has been able to build institutions such as the civil service and the judiciary, which are necessary for a democratic and transformative state. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*, enshrines a rights-based approach and envisions a prosperous, non-racial, non-sexist democracy that belongs to its entire people. Despite these successes, Adato, Carter and May (2006) reveal that too many people are trapped in poverty and remain a highly unequal society. According to the National Planning Commission (2012, p.23), South Africans from all walks of life welcomed the diagnostic as a frank, constructive assessment. This led to the development of the draft national plan, released in November 2011. Building on the diagnostic, Zarenda (2013) points out that the Plan added four thematic areas: rural economy, social protection, regional and world affairs, and community safety. The National Planning Commission (2013, p.45) indicates that South Africans broadly supported the draft plan, proposing modifications and making suggestions to implement it effectively. Their input informed the final NDP 2030.

Despite the slow pace of the implementation of the NDP 2030, Shingare and Kanoi (2020) indicate that COVID-19 has caused many problems and slow down the pace of the mission and vision of the Plan. Lenoël and Young (2020, p.10) stress that the implementation of the NDP was expected to slow down by at least 5.1 to 7.9 % in 2020 and recover slowly through 2024. This led to major setbacks in addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality. The number of households below the poverty line increases as households falls from the lower middle class (Dartanto, 2020). Mahore (2020, p.97) points out that 54% of households that have been pushed out of permanent jobs to informal or temporary contracts as a coping mechanism for business affected by COVID-19, are likely to fall into poverty after the stimulus package is over, whereas 34% of households are likely to exit the middle class into vulnerability. Parsons (2020) stresses that inequality within and among individuals are being exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19, as the poor and vulnerable are unable to protect themselves. While government social protection grants tend to target the poorest, care and support is also given to those who are unemployed and the vulnerable middle class, to reduce their likelihood of spilling into

poverty (Devereux & Cuesta, 2021, p.341). The COVID-19 has had far-reaching economic consequences beyond the spread of the disease itself. During the earlier stage of the pandemic, the implementation of the NDP was expected to slow down as funds were to be used to find solutions in fighting against the pandemic (Van de Pas, 2020, p.123).

Problem Statement

Section 56 of the Local Government: Municipal System Act, 2000 (Act No. 32 of 2000) makes provision for the core principles, mechanisms and processes that are necessary to enable municipalities to move progressively towards the social and economic upliftment of local communities, and ensure universal access to essential services that are affordable to all. The *Public Finance Management Act (Act No. of 1999)* intends to ensure that all revenue, expenditure, assets and liabilities of government are managed efficiently and effectively. *Sections 21 to 23 of the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act No. 56 of 2003)* makes provision for community participation processes, regarding the municipal budget, integrated development plan, performance management processes, and policy development. *Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005 (Act No. 13 of 2005)* has established a framework for the national government, provincial governments and local governments to promote and facilitate intergovernmental relations. *National Development Agency Act, 1998 (Act No. 108 of 1998)* aimed at promoting an appropriate and sustainable partnership between the government and civil society organisations to eradicate poverty and its causes; to determine the objects and functions of the Agency; to determine the way it is to be managed and governed; to regulate its staff matters and financial affairs; and to provide for connected matters.

Despite the provision of the legislations above, there are challenges that are slowing down the mission and vision of the NDP which are caused by the COVID-19 such as economic loss, lack of time for service delivery, increased unemployment rate, and utilisation of funds only to health care facilities (Kanjere, 2021; Annan, 2021; Jones & Carstairs, 2021). Due to the lockdown regulations across South Africa, many people lost their jobs in 2020 as companies reduced staff or closed (John et al., 2022; Maemu, Munzhedzi & Mathebula, 2024; Maemu, Munzhedzi & Mathebula, 2025). Ozili and Arun (2020:4) further stress that the COVID-19 pandemic has done significant harm to an already bruised economy. Safely returning to work and actively promoting employment must be a top priority for economic policymakers and stakeholders over the coming few years. *Regulations of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002)* declares that schools were closed for a considerable period and visiting other places including churches and places of entertainment were also forbidden as a measure to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the state report made by former South Africa's Statistician-General Dr Pali Lehohla (2020), it was stressed that since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NDP implementation has been slowed down and South Africa faces a spike in unemployment rise to 44.4%, deep-set corruption, and an overwhelmed educational and health system that has struggled to dust-off apartheid legacy problems. As indicated by the economist Miriam Altman (2020), COVID-19 and corruption are some of the reasons the NDP's targets have not been met in South Africa. Miriam Altman (2020) further indicates that the government aimed to reduce unemployment in South Africa by 25.4% in 2010 to 20% in 2015 and to 14% in 2020 and then to 6.0% in 2030, COVID-19 has caused serious problems which may limit these goals. According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2021), South Africa recorded unemployment rate grew to 44.4% in the third quarter of 2021 which was the highest unemployment rate recorded in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey since 2008 (Garekae & Shackleton, 2020). According to the National Planning Commission (2012, p.34), South African society remains

divided. Many schools, suburbs and places of worship are integrated, but many more are not. South Africa remains one of the most unequal economies in the world (Mosomi, 2020). Deep inequalities and the associated low levels of trust have a highly negative impact on economic development and make it harder to forge a social compact that could move South Africa onto a higher developmental trajectory. Armstrong, Lekezwa and Siebrits (2008, p.34) point that 28.4% of the population in SA lived below the poverty line in 2006. Chen and Ravallion (2013, p.22) mention that fewer people were regarded as poor by 2011 when the level of poverty fell to 21.4%. However, this regressed in 2015 when poverty rose to 25.2%. According to the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (2018), South Africa has the highest rate of inequality, wherein the gap between the rich and the poor remains large.

Research Method

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), research methodology is defined as the researcher's general approach in carrying out the research project, while on the other hand, Burns and Grove (2010) define research methodology as the methodology that includes the design, setting, sample, methodological limitations and the data-collection and analysis techniques in a study. This paper used mixed method in the research. Creswell and Plano (2011) define mixed method as collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Mixed method is also defined by Cameron (2011) as the method that includes a qualitative and quantitative dimension in which difficulties arise when the researcher attempts to articulate how the two elements relate to one another. Mixed method is used because its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. The mixed method is also used to help in answering the research questions that cannot be answered by quantitative or qualitative methods alone. The researcher used both the quantitative and qualitative method.

Bryman (2012) defines quantitative research as a research strategy that emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data, while Edmonds and Kennedy (2010, p.4) define quantitative research as a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study, asks specific, narrow questions, collects quantifiable data from participants, analyses these numbers using statistics, and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased objective manner. Quantitative research is used in this study because the findings are likely to be generalised to the whole population or a sub-population as it involves the larger sample which is randomly selected. The quantitative method is also used to investigate the answers to the questions starting with 'how many', 'how much', and 'to what extent'.

Burns and Grove (2013) define the qualitative method as a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and situations, to give the meaning of such experience. On the other hand, Holloway and Wheeler (2010) define qualitative research as a form of social enquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experience and the world in which they live. The qualitative method is used in the proposed study to explore the behaviour, perspectives, experiences and feelings of people and emphasise the understanding of these elements. The qualitative method is also used because it is essential in the sense that it emphasises the participation of stakeholders, mutual learning and sharing of experiences.

The State of COVID-19 in South Africa

Lone and Ahmad (2020) indicate that COVID-19 (corona virus) had a major impact on South Africa's economy. The World Bank estimates that the economy contracted by 7% in 2020, as the pandemic weighed heavily on both external demand and domestic activity as the government implemented containment measures (Alacevich, 2020). This severe contraction is estimated to increase poverty by over 2 million people. Bulled and Singer (2020) mention that South Africa entered the pandemic after several years of low growth. Bulled and Singer (2020, p.1231) adds that in 2019, the economy grew by 0.2% (in 2018 it was 0.8%) partially caused by the resurgence of load shedding associated with operational and financial difficulties at the energy utility Eskom. Moreover, Jackson (2021, p.75) shows that the persistence of the pandemic at the global and domestic levels continued to constrain the economic recovery during the first half of 2021. Keehan, Cuckler, Poisal, Sisko, Smith, Madison and Hardesty (2020, p.704) note that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was expected to rebound to 3% in 2021. Keehan *et al.* (2020) emphasise that commodity prices remain important for South Africa as a major net exporter of minerals and net importer of oil. Grabara, Tleppayev, Dabylova, Mihardjo and Dacko-Pikiewicz (2021) are of the view that strengthening investment, including foreign direct investment, will be critical to propel growth and create jobs. Chiwona-Karltun, Amuakwa-Mensah, Wamala-Larsson, Amuakwa-Mensah, Abu Hatab, Made and Bizoza (2021) articulate that policy makers must balance the positive health effects of strong distancing measures, such as lockdowns, against their economic costs, especially the burdens imposed on low-income and food-insecure households.

Anyanwu and Salami (2021) argue that the social distancing measures deployed by South Africa impose large economic costs and have negative implications for the factor distribution of income. Brinton and Oh (2019) reveal that labour with low education levels are much more strongly affected than labour with secondary or tertiary education. As a result, Brinton and Oh (2019) add that households with low levels of educational attainment and high dependence on labor income would experience an enormous real income shock that would clearly jeopardize the food security of these households. However, Chiwona-Karltun *et al.* (2021) show that in South Africa, total incomes for low-income households are significantly insulated by government transfer payments. From public health, income distribution and food security perspectives, Lone, and Ahmad (2020) point that the remarkably rapid and severe shocks imposed because of COVID-19 illustrate the value of having in place transfer policies that support vulnerable households in the event of black swan type shocks.

As indicated by May (2020, p.2) South Africa's overall GDP was expected to decline by at least 5.1 and up to 7.9% in 2020 and recover slowly through 2024. This will lead to major setbacks in addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality as the Socio-economic is impacted negatively by the COVID-19 pandemic. Keehan *et al.* (2020) stress that the number of households below the poverty line increases as households falls from the lower middle class. Anyanwu and Salami (2021, p.17) indicate that 54% percent of households that have been pushed out of permanent jobs to informal or temporary contracts as a coping mechanism for businesses affected by COVID-19 are likely to fall into poverty after the 6-months stimulus package is over. Anyanwu and Salami (2021, p.17) further mention that 34% of households are likely to exit the middle class into vulnerability.

While government social protection grants tend to target the poorest, Bulled and Singer (2020) posit that care and support needs to be provided to those at the borderline of the poverty line, such as the vulnerable middle class, to reduce their likelihood of slipping into poverty. South Africa is the country with the fifth-highest number of cases of COVID-19 in the world, and the

highest number of cases on the African continent (Maemu, Munzhedzi & Mathebula, 2024; Maemu, Munzhedzi & Mathebula, 2025). Mathebula and Runhare (2021:187) further observe that economic sectors most disadvantaged by the COVID-19 outbreak include textiles, education services, catering and accommodations (including tourism), beverages, tobacco, glass products, and footwear.

Trautrim (2020, p.1067) indicates that in April of 2020, the International Labour Organization predicted global job losses of about 305 million and an estimated 1.6 billion jobs at risk for the most vulnerable in the labour market. The lasting effects of the pandemic significantly weigh on the role of job acquisition in the South African economy, which Anyanwu and Salami (2021) argue that it is a main factor in upward mobility for struggling to escape poverty. In addition, Anyanwu and Salami (2021) state that the pandemic may not only have short-term income effects but also hamper people's income-generating activities in the longer term, as households will turn to liquidating their small savings and selling off productive assets to cope during the lockdown period. Trautrim (2020) points three main ways that the pandemic can and will impact urban household food security. The first is the food supply chain which appears to be relatively stable at this time. Next is a decrease in food purchasing power and jobs. Essentially, the working class is the most affected by the lockdown. In this case, Trautrim (2020) shows that there will most likely be an emphasis on non-perishable and processed foods with a long shelf life due to mobility restrictions. Alacevich (2020) states that food insecurity and nutritional inadequacy are pandemic factors on the rise, challenging the safety the South African diet, especially for vulnerable immigrant populations. As indicated by Lone and Ahmad (2020), the shutdown of schools may have increased the number of meals parents at home would have had to make, when otherwise they would have relied on food programs. Meanwhile, Lone and Ahmad (2020) add that many African immigrant women are domestic workers and may have received one or more meals each day at their clients' homes. Now, Esteve-Llorens *et al.* (2021) maintain that these food sources are not accessible because of the health and economic crisis. Furthermore, Lal *et al.* (2021) attest that securing employment, which was already an uphill battle for African immigrants before COVID- 19, has become even more difficult.

Impact of COVID-19 on Employment

Rogerson and Rogerson (2020) state that the thirteenth edition of the South Africa economic update, building back better from COVID-19, with a special focus on jobs, examines how supporting young entrepreneurs could be one of the ways the country could address unemployment, among its other pressing social challenges in an environment of weakened economic growth. Sheller (2021, p.1440) shows that the economic update expects South Africa's growth to rebound to 4% in 2021, the fastest pace in over a decade, bouncing back from 2020 deep contraction of 7%. However, Porfiriev (2020) states that medium-term prospects for higher and more inclusive growth remain constrained. Jomo and Chowdhury (2020, p.230) add that growth is expected to slow down to 2.1% in 2022 and to 1.5% in 2023. Troy (2020, p.18) points out that South Africa entered the COVID-19 pandemic with a low employment rate, which for 2020 was 29.22%, a 0.75% increase from 2019 and a rate of 28.47% in 2019 and a decade of weak job creation, far below the standards of most upper-middle-income countries. Troy *et al.* (2020) state that despite the government's solid response to the pandemic, jobs have been severely impacted, and recovery is slow. Lim (2021, p.5) shows that by the end of 2020, despite two quarters of employment growth, the number of employed people had fallen by nearly 1.5 million, and the wages of workers who still had jobs had fallen by 10 - 15%. Cilliers, Sankaran, Armstrong, Mathur and Nugapitiya (2021, p.1047) reveal that in 2021, only 40% of employment losses had been recovered.

Malaya (2021) stresses that job losses in COVID-19 times are disproportionately concentrated among low-income earners, worsening already severe inequalities despite the government's decisive and pro-poor response with transfer programs that partially cushioned the negative impacts of the pandemic. Malaya (2021) further indicates that low-wage workers suffered almost four times more job losses than high-wage earners. In addition,

Malaya (2021) shows that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has exposed structural weaknesses in the job market. Li and Heath (2020) state that young people, in particular, face acute unemployment rates, with an incidence twice as high as among older age groups. Li and Heath (2020, p.857) indicate that among 15–24-year-olds, 63% are unemployed and looking for work, whereas among 25–34-year-olds, this rate reaches 41%. When discouraged workers are included, unemployment rates are as high as 74% for 15–24-year-olds and 51% for 25–34-year-olds (Li and Heath, 2020, p.857).

Padilla and Hudson (2019) suggest that entrepreneurship and self-employment offer the biggest opportunity to create jobs in South Africa, particularly with the increasing number of start-ups, especially in the digital sector, which could become an engine of jobs growth in the future. Padilla and Hudson (2019, p.128) add that Cape Town alone, the tech capital of Africa, has over 450 tech firms and employs more than 40,000 people. Gachie (2021) shows that in 2020, a total of R1.2 billion disclosed investments went into its tech start-ups. Prachand *et al.* (2020, p.285) indicate that in South Africa, self-employment including own-account workers with own businesses, freelancers, only represents 10% of all jobs, compared to around 30% in most upper-middle income economies such as Turkey, Mexico, or Brazil."

Alova *et al.* (2021) state that in contrast to projections by global multilaterals, forecasts by South African state institutions tend to project much lower job losses. Alova *et al.* (2021) show that key estimates are that job losses will be about as severe as during the 2008 global financial crisis, even though the annualised contraction of South Africa's GDP from COVID-19 is expected to be at least five times larger in 2020 alone. The National Treasury (2021) has forecast job losses of between 690,000 and 1.79 million for 2020, a downward revision from its original 3 to 7 million job-loss projections because it is now using a full-time equivalent measure and adjusting for furloughs and other measures to mitigate the impact on jobs. Leal *et al.* (2020) state that the generally accepted relationship between GDP growth and unemployment growth helps in the assessment of existing forecasts of employment loss in South Africa. In existing forecasts, employment projections are out of sync with corresponding GDP forecasts, even though observation of over time, a clear relationship between GDP and employment in the case of South Africa and for other economies during COVID-19 (Troy *et al.*, 2020).

Stats SA (2020) reported that 8.1 per cent of respondents had already lost their jobs or had to close their businesses. The estimates are also consistent with actual job loss numbers released by advanced economies such as diversified industries. Coetzee and Kagee (2020, p.1098) indicate that the estimates of the job losses are larger than jobs lost as a result of the last crisis, the global financial crisis, in which around a million jobs were lost and job growth was driven almost exclusively by growth in the public sector in the years after 2008. As noted by Sheller (2021), the contraction of GDP is likely to be five times larger in the COVID-19 crisis, although the nature of the shocks is different. Although the proportion of jobs lost are high, Blundell *et al.* (2020, p.295) assume that there is a 10 per cent reduction in final demand, only 7.7 per cent of total wage income in the economy is lost, amounting to R185 billion or around 3.6 per cent of 2019 GDP. Blundell *et al.* (2020, p.295) further view that this may appear lower than expected, for two main reasons: value added declines by 9.7 per cent and 44 per cent of incomes go to profits in our model, followed by 2.2 per cent to government through net indirect taxes on production and products. Mathebula and Runhare (2021) state that jobs at risk are

concentrated in the formal, private, non-government sectors of the economy. Mathebula and Runhare (2021) add that assuming a shock of 10%, 66% of total job losses would be in the formal sector. Esteve-Llorens *et al.* (2021) state that many of the jobs might not be lost, even immediately, because in practice there are other labour market adjustment mechanisms, including reductions in wages, working hours, work practices and processes, and slips into informality, as well as other precarious forms of income generation.

Zemtsov *et al.* (2019) state that jobs at risk are also concentrated in the tertiary sector of the economy. Zemtsov *et al.* (2019, p.84) further show that 69.7% of job losses are in the tertiary sector, followed by 12% in the primary sector, and 18.3% in the secondary sector. In contrast, Lim *et al.* (2021, p.10) mention that the tertiary sector accounts for 74% of total employment, the secondary sector 15%, and the primary sector 10%. Lim *et al.* (2021) maintain that this reflects the fact that the production structure of the South African economy has changed over time, as employment and production have shifted towards the service sector in line with global trends in value added, demand, and innovation. In addition, Lim *et al.* (2021) add that tertiary sector also highlights the unique nature of the shock, as services-based consumption spending is hit particularly hard. Gehrke (2019) reveals that jobs at risk are higher than expected in agriculture. Gehrke (2019) adds that to a large extent this is due to the large number of workers employed in agriculture, almost double that of coal, gold, metals, and other mining and quarrying combined, as agricultural production has grown and mechanisation remains much lower than in the hard commodity sector. Malaya (2021) indicates that the primary sector and the service sector such as agriculture and mining are also experiencing large contractions because they are most driven by consumption spending, which accounts for a larger portion of final demand in these sectors. Malaya (2021) maintains that this also corresponds to the fact that primary subsectors have high levels of human-to-human work. Cilliers *et al.* (2021, p.1048) show that gold production had already been halted in 2020 because of the rapid spread of infection among miners.

Given the distribution of impact, the most at-risk jobs are those of lower-skilled workers, often in lower-earning jobs, on flexible work contracts, or in the informal sector (Wood *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, Wood *et al.* (2019) state that these jobs also have weaker protection and a higher possibility of substitution of their employment with home production or mechanisation. Malaya (2021, p.100) points out that 86.2% of jobs at risk are in unskilled, low-skilled, and semi-skilled occupations. In continuation, Biryukova *et al.* (2022, p.14) indicate that only 13.8% of jobs at risk are skilled jobs. Chaloff and Namiki (2020, p.145) further show that 28.8% of jobs at risk are basic, 22.6% are low-skilled, and 34.8% are semi-skilled. Apart from the trade sector, Alova *et al.* (2021, p.158) reveal that the subsector with the highest number of jobs at risk is community, social and personal services, which consists of domestic workers, cooks, gardeners, laundries, and hair services, along with cinemas, artists, and live entertainment, among other low-skilled workers and sub-sectors.

Keehan *et al.* (2020, p.710) state that although South Africa's informal sector is smaller than in many developing countries, a large number of informal sector workers are at risk of losing their earning ability: between 255,426 and 766,277 informal sector jobs as a result of a 5–15% shock to final demand. Brinton and Oh (2019) state that women and men are similarly impacted by the COVID-19 shock. Brinton and Oh (2019:110) further attest that women account for 39.9% of potential job losses and 41.4% of total employment in the economy, while men account for 60.1% of potential job losses and 58.6% of employment in the economy. Kabeer (2021) views that potential job losses for men and women tend to be concentrated in the same sectors, with some notable exceptions. Wholesale and retail trade is the largest source of job losses for women (178,277), even though men account for more absolute job losses than women in this sub-sector (Li & Heath, 2020).

Wood *et al.* (2019, p.57) state that community, social, and personal services see considerably more loss of jobs for women than for men (163,707 total losses), accounting for roughly one-quarter of all potential female job losses. Wood *et al.* (2019) show that this sector includes a sizable number of domestic workers, overwhelmingly female. St Cyr *et al.* (2021, p.6185) reveal that among major sources of employment, catering and accommodation also has more job losses for women than men (40,229). St Cyr *et al.* (2021, p.6185) add that other notable job losses for women that outnumber men are also expected in health and social work (46,147), wearing apparel (6,317), and private education (19,652). St Cyr *et al.* (2021, p.6185) show that in wearing apparel, the gender gap is particularly large, with women accounting for 6,317 job losses and men only 1,258. St Cyr *et al.* (2021:6185) show that for men, job losses are concentrated in wholesale and retail trade, other community, social, and personal services, business activities, agriculture, and construction, which account for 62% of all job losses.

Beyond the expected employment losses, Angell *et al.* (2020, p.128) state that it should be noted that women represent a much higher proportion of workers, 78.3% in the health and social work sector and are at the frontline in the battle against the virus. In addition, as seen around the world, Smith *et al.* (2021) mention that women have been impacted more by the unequal distribution of the care burden, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Adetayo (2020, p.373) indicates that 11.6% of those in working poverty earning below R5,086 per month are at risk of job loss compared with 9.8% of workers earning above the working-poverty line. Onyema *et al.* (2020, p.108) add that those in working poverty also comprise 65% of total job losses. Maluleke *et al.* (2022, p.83) show that 15% of all workers impacted are earning below the Statistics South Africa 2018 Upper-Bound Poverty Line (UBPL) of R1,183 per month, even though they only represent 13% of total workers. Moreover, Bisaga *et al.* (2019, p.56) point that around 35% of job losses for those earning below the UBPL are in the other community, social and personal services subsector, mainly as domestic workers, gardeners, or cooks.

Bigger and Millington (2020) are of the view that some job losses are likely to take longer to materialise. At the outset, Bigger and Millington (2020) add that the model assumes full flexibility in labour markets and that the labour market adjusts through changes in quantities. Khanna (2020) is of the view that workers do not immediately lose their jobs when their sector's output contracts. Furthermore, Khanna (2020) shows that adjustments in work hours or wages are other mechanisms that companies can use to minimise wage costs as output contracts. Moreover, Khanna (2020) states that more skilled workers have contracts, and government workers have strong unions to protect them from a downturn. Kabeer (2021, p.17) indicates that 21%-point net decline in active employment as a share of the working age population, while there is a 9%-point net increase in non-employment, a 7%-point net increase in paid leave, and a 4%-point net increase in temporary layoffs. Coetzee and Kagee (2020) suggest that the COVID-19 tremor will likely have long-run impacts on the South African labor market.

Findings

The focus of this sub-topic is to present the findings and analyse the research data obtained. The views and opinions that are objective and factual from participants and respondents in this study, which include municipal officials, IDP officials, LED officials, members of SANCO, Traditional leaders, the Manager of communication, and community members selected as a sample of the study, are presented. The analysis is based on the data collected through quantitative and qualitative methods. Through these two methods, the researcher used questionnaires and interviews to collect data.

COVID-19 Is Having a Major Impact on South Africa's Economy

Regarding the statement that COVID-19 had a major impact on the South African economy, 135 respondents, who constitute 67.5% strongly agreed with the statement, while 62, who constitute 31% agreed. Two of the respondents, who constitute 1% were not sure of the statement, while none disagreed, and only 01, which constitutes 0.5% strongly disagreed. Most of the respondents strongly agreed that COVID-19 had a major impact on the South African economy. It can be concluded that COVID-19 had negative effects on the economy of South Africa due to the COVID-19 pandemic regulations, such as lockdowns to restrict a large number of people in the working environment.

Workers with Low Education Levels Are Much More Affected than Workers with Secondary or Tertiary Education by COVID-19

The above statement was adapted to provide an overview of employees who were mostly affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 and its regulations.

A total of 103, which constitute 51.5% agreed that workers with low education levels are much more affected than workers with secondary or tertiary education by COVID-19, while 81, which constitute 40.5 % strongly agreed with the statement. Eight, which constitute 4% of the respondents, were not sure, while 06, which constitute 3% disagreed and 02, which constitute 1% strongly disagreed with the statement. The figures indicate that the majority of the respondents agreed that workers with low education levels are much more affected than workers with secondary or tertiary education by COVID-19. This concludes that workers with low educational levels are more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic as they lost their jobs due to employment reduction and retrenchment.

Inequalities within Vhembe District Municipality Are Being Exposed and Exacerbated by COVID-19, as the Poor and Vulnerable Are Unable to Protect Themselves

Data indicated that the majority of the respondents, at 87, which constitute 43.5% agreed that inequalities within Vhembe District Municipality are being exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19, as the poor and vulnerable are unable to protect themselves, followed by 70 of the respondents, who constitute 35% strongly agreed with the statement. Ten respondents, who constitute 5% were not sure of the statement, while 29, who constitute 14.5% disagreed, and 04, who constitute 2% strongly disagreed with the statement. A conclusion can be drawn based on the above data that the majority of the respondents agreed that inequalities of access to service delivery within Vhembe District Municipality are being exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19, as many communities are unable to protect themselves and rely on the government for sustainability.

Vhembe District Municipality Is One of the Municipalities with the Highest Number of COVID-19 Cases in the Limpopo Province

Data indicated that most of the respondents at 103, which constitutes 51.5% strongly disagree that Vhembe District Municipality is one of the municipalities with the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the Limpopo Province, while on the other hand, 51, which constitutes 25.5% disagreed with the statement. Eight, which constitute 4% of the respondents, were not sure about the statement, while on the other hand, 22, which constitute 11% strongly agreed, and 16, which constitute 8% agreed with the statement. The statistics above show that the majority, at 154, which constitutes 77% disagreed that Vhembe District Municipality is one of the municipalities with the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the Limpopo Province. This

indicates that infections in the Vhembe District Municipality were not high compared to other municipalities in Limpopo Province.

The capacity of the Local Economy at the End of the COVID-19 Pandemic Will Be Significantly Impaired, and Recovery Will Take Longer

A total of 101 respondents, who constitute 50.5% agreed that the capacity of the local economy at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic is significantly impaired and recovery will take longer, while 87, who constitute 43.5% strongly agreed with the statement. Five, which constitute 2.5% were not sure about the statement, while on the other hand, 07, which constitute 3.5% disagreed, and none of the respondents strongly disagreed. From the information above, a conclusion can be drawn that the majority of the respondents agreed that the capacity of the local economy at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic will be significantly impaired and recovery will take longer.

Data Collected Through Interviews

Participants indicate that many people died due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and new infections are still recorded, but it's only a few per day within the jurisdiction of the Municipality. Most of the municipal officials who are responsible for the implementation of the NDP died with their skills and knowledge that could be used for effective implementation of the NDP by 2030. It was found that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the unemployment rate within the jurisdiction of the Municipality due to the lockdown regulations, which affected some businesses to reduce staff and other businesses to close as they were not generating income to sustain their operations. The economy of South Africa collapsed during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and economic activities such as mining, tourism and industries were not operating during the lockdown regulations.

Participants indicate that the movement of people from one area to another was restricted. Gathering many people in a single place was also not accepted. Municipal officials were working from home, and there was no time to focus on the implementation of the NDP 2030. In addition, the reason for working from home was to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Business activities are getting back to normal, and COVID-19 regulations are suspended. From the information above, it can be concluded that COVID-19 affected the lives of the communities within the Vhembe District Municipality, and unemployment is the major challenge that communities are facing due to the outbreak of the pandemic. This finding is in line with Mubangizi et al. 2023 whose findings unravelled a diverse spectrum of adverse impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic across rural municipalities. Consequently, although business activities and freedom of communities are back to normal, there are many job seekers in the community with few job opportunities, as the country's economy was negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study recommends that an Economic Recovery Plan should be fostered to address the impact of COVID-19 on the South African economy. This indicates that the Municipality should focus on employment creation and the reduction of the inflation rate. The paper recommends that employment creation should be based on workers with low education levels, as they are much more affected by COVID-19 than workers with secondary or tertiary education. The Municipality should fight against inequalities within and among nations and provide

adequate service delivery to the communities. The operation of the banking sector, the payments system, pension and medical aid activities should continue even during the stages of lockdown so that communities can seek their medical attention and banking transactions for sustainability. The paper recommends that the capacity of the local economy at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic should be improved to achieve a successful implementation of the NDP by 2030. Municipal officials should be trained to gain skills for the proper implementation of the NDP 2030. The municipality should fund businesses that are closed so that they can reopen and contribute to the economic recovery to achieve the implementation of the NDP 2030. The paper recommends that Local Economic Development (LED) programs, such as service delivery, should be put into action and continue to achieve the goals of the NDP 2030. It is recommended in this paper that municipal officials should get back to the offices and suspend the working from home policy so that they can focus more on the successful implementation of the NDP 2030. The Relief Fund should be given to the households that lost their jobs during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic so that they can meet their needs. Business activities should get back to normal, and COVID-19 regulations must be suspended for good to achieve the successful implementation of the NDP 2030.

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