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The effect of Covid-19 in the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 in the Vhembe District Municipality, South Africa

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Abstract

Coronavirus disease of 2019 commonly known as COVID-19 has had major effect in the socio-economic development throughout the globe including in South Africa. COVID-19 has to a large extent had a negative effect on the on the implementation of government policies, programmes and projects. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 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 inequities, and strong leadership throughout society 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. For this reason, this article seeks to evaluate the effect of COVID-19 on the implementation of the NDP 2030. This empirical article undertakes the evaluation through extensive review of existing literature and reports from relevant public institutions about COVID-19 and its effect on the NDP 2030. The main conclusion is that COVID-19 continues to have a negative effect in the implementation of public policies, programmes and projects including NDP 2030. The article recommends the implementation of the sustainable approach in the execution of the provisions of the NDP 2030. People must be at the centre of all policy making and implementation including the NDP 2030.

Key words: Covid-19, implementation, National Development Plan 2030, National Development Plan.

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the impact of corona virus disease otherwise commonly referred to as COVID-19 on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) with specific reference to the Vhembe District Municipality in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The NDP aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. According to the National Planning Commission (NPC) (2012:18), 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. According to National Planning Commission (2012:12), 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, 2019:82). However, the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic destabilized the entirety of government operation including the implementation of NDP. Budgets at all spheres of government had to be reconsidered due to the disruptions of the pandemic. This articles recognizes that challenges existed before COVID-19, but seeks to investigate the impact within which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of NDP in the Vhembe District Municipality of the Limpopo province. Empirical data collected and analysed so that so that appropriate findings and recommendations could be made. The subsequent paragraphs discusses the problem statement and the theoretical framework selected.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

South Africa recorded unemployment rate grew to 44.4% in the third quarter of 2021 which is the highest unemployment rate recorded in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey since 2008 (Garekai & Shackleton, 2020). According to the National Planning Commission (2012:34), South African society remains divided. Armstrong, Lekezwa and Siebrits (2008:34) point that 28.4% of the population in South Africa lived below the poverty line in 2006. Chen and Ravallion (2013:22) 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.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

Development is defined by Todaro and Smith (2012:31) as a multi-dimensional process that involves major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as economic growth, reduction of inequality, and eradication of absolute poverty. Most scholars propounded theories concerning development, how it is achieved and how it is impeded. Sustainable Development Theory was found relevant to this article. Mensah (2019:20) indicates that sustainable development is an organising principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend on. Mensah (2019:20) further postulates that the desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Verma, 2019:4). Sustainability addresses the global challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. Verma (2019:5) further declares that the concept of sustainable development has shifted its focus more towards economic development, social development and environmental protection for future generations.

Sustainable Development Theory is suitable in this article in that it addresses the very issues the NDP is seeking to address. Improving the lives of the current general populace without compromising the needs of the future generations is what the Theory and the Plan are about. Amongst other things, NDP seeks to address social and economic inequalities in South Africa by redressing the imbalances of the past through creating sustainable employment by 2030, harmonious social relations and state capabilities. In essence, there is an inevitable relationship between the selected theoretical framework and the focus of this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lone and Ahmad (2020:1300) claim that COVID-19 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, 2020:131). This severe contraction was estimated to increase poverty by over 2 million people. Bulled and Singer (2020:1231) mentioned that South Africa entered the pandemic after several years of low growth. In essence, the South African economy was already struggling pre-COVID-19 pandemic.

Anyanwu and Salami (2021:31) argue that the distancing measures deployed by South Africa imposed large economic costs and had negative implications. Brinton and Oh (2019:105) 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 (2019:105) 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.

The implication of covid-19 in the national development plan 2030

Padilla and Hudson (2019:127) state that the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that the consequences of the crisis of COVID-19 could erase up to six years of human development. Anyanwu and Salami (2021:27) projected that the crisis could push between 71 and 100 million people back into extreme poverty. The International Monetary Fund (2019) estimated that emerging and developing economies' GDPs would experience a 3% contraction in 2020. These early estimates, and the pace at which the situation has been evolving since the beginning of the crisis, give a sense of the development crisis which is in the making.

Rogerson and Rogerson (2020:1083) state that South Africa will have to do more with less to assist the recovery of their economies and the implementation of the NDP 2030. Sheller (2021:1436) stresses that the pandemic has raised the question compounding crises and of interlinkages between the national and international spheres. Sheller (2021:1436) further adds that developing countries entered the crisis with pre-existing vulnerabilities that are now being exacerbated. Brinton and Oh (2019:115) stress that the COVID-19 crisis has put more pressure on the NDP regarding the health systems, a higher number of vulnerable populations, such as informal workers and migrants, and can accentuate humanitarian and environmental crises. Furthermore, Lone and Ahmad (2020) argue that developing countries' high dependency on demand from advanced economies, commodities prices, tourism and remittances from migrants has already exposed their economies to even dimmer perspectives. Moreover, Jomo and Chowdhury (2020:226) postulate that even though governments in developing countries have taken immediate measures to contain the shock, their shrinking fiscal space might hamper these efforts and push them on a path towards unsustainable debt.

Covid-19 and its effect on the National Development Plan 2030

The NDP sets out methods and targets to achieve by 2030, which eradicate food poverty and improve people's health and wellbeing (Fourie, 2018:765). Lone and Ahmad (2020:1300) stress that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, found a vulnerable South African economy. Lone and Ahmad (2020:1300) further demonstrate that at the time pandemic reached the nation, economy had experienced consecutive quarters of a recession. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic deepened the economic crisis (Stats SA, 2023). Wolfson and Leung (2020:412) point that many people lost their jobs, many have gone without income for extended periods, and many are going hungry every day. Sharma *et al.* (2020:26) indicate that inequality is expected to widen and poverty to deepen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analytica (2020:178) emphasises that the stagnation of the economy for a long period coupled with the COVID-19 crisis has also led to low levels of operation in the various sectors of the South African economy. This trend is projected to continue, painting a dire picture for gross fixed capital formation. Analytica (2020:178) indicates that a significant reduction in the gross fixed capital formation variable is a troubling development; given that this variable is critical in sustaining and growing the productive base of the economy. Rakshit and Basistha (2020:243) point that drastic declines in capacity utilization imply that

investment plans and projects that were affordable before the impact of the crisis face the possibility of not being affordable with prolonged subdued capacity utilization.

Booyesen (2021:214) reveals that COVID-19 coordinating and responsive structures such as National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), and National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure have sharply drawn the attention to the need to embrace the prospects of optimal utilising data infrastructures towards reducing acute hunger and malnutrition at the district/metropolitan municipalities. Kassegn and Endris (2021:188) state that COVID-19 worsens the socio-economic dimensions that relate to hunger and malnutrition among the people due to the economic contraction, closure of businesses, and job losses. Kassegn and Endris (2021:188) further show that the South African Government pre-emptively responded by investing R500 billion into the economy to boost the lively hood of the poor people and private businesses.

Mangen and Veale (2020:45) reveal that the COVID-19 pandemic is having an especially devastating impact on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable South Africans, including young people. Mangen and Veale (2020:45) further show that because of this crisis, it is anticipated that youth unemployment will worsen even further as the rate was 63,9% for those aged 15-24 and 42,1% for those aged 25-34 years, while the current official national rate stands at 34,5%. Laborde *et al.* (2021:132) posit that the COVID-19 crisis poses an additional threat to the food security of millions of South Africans who were already food insecure before the outbreak of COVID-19. Moreover, Laborde *et al.* (2021:132) view that in the long run the combined effects of the crisis could disrupt the function of food systems. Such a disruption could result in consequences for health and nutrition of a severity and scale never seen in more than half a century (Nwosu & Oyenubi, 2021:10). Liu and Yan (2020:395) state that the South African economy experienced consecutive quarters in 2020 of negative growth prior to the intensification of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the economy. Chilunjika *et al.* (2020:87) stress that the unemployment rate has remained stubbornly high and has been increasing prior to the impact of the crisis permeating through the South African economy.

Corruption during COVID-19 pandemic

The African National Congress (ANC) (2016:5) promised in its local government election manifesto to intensify the fight against fraud and corruption in local government and social fabric crimes in communities. Munzhedzi and Phago (2020:181) are of the view that several other opposition parties such as Democratic Alliance (DA) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) highlighted in their respective manifestos intentions to address the corruption issue in municipal institutions. Shaw, Robertson and Ranceva (2021:11) posit that corruption particularly in the procurement process is so severe that municipal service provision is affected enormously. Munzhedzi and Makwembere (2019:664) avers that the promise by the ANC was necessitated by the fact that corruption and maladministration were so rampant in the local sphere of government. Munzhedzi and Phago (2020:185) states that corruption and failure to punish those involved in corruption is one of the biggest challenges confronting municipalities in South Africa. Munzhedzi (2016:7) also claim that municipal procurement and corruption are like inseparable twins in that there is none without the other. This in essence means that most of the corrupt practices in municipalities are in the municipal procurement processes.

The EFF (2020:55) claims that there are many cases in Mpumalanga and elsewhere in South Africa where food parcels specifically meant for COVID-19 beneficiaries were being channeled to member and supporters of the ANC by its councilors. The EFF (2020:55) adds that this basically means that there is biasness in the distribution of food parcels by certain councillors in some municipalities. Moreover, the EFF (2020:55) points that this is not only regarding the issue of food parcels, but the procurement of goods and services needed during COVID-19 pandemic environment. Munzhedzi and Makwembere (2019:659) state that the management of COVID-19 and the achievement of developmental agenda are likely not to be realised if the sphere which should play a critical role is still riddled with corruption incidences. Kassegn and Endris (2021:188) posit that the Government of South Africa invested R500 billion into the economy to boost the livelihood of the poor people, and unfortunately, private businesses colluded with government officials to gain in their private capacities.

Ossome (2021:70) states that relaxations of these Public Finance Management Act 1 of 1999 and Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 make it easier for those with corrupt appetites to manipulate the good intentions of government. Wygal *et al.* (2021:36) reveal that the intention of relaxing these legislations is intended to minimise bureaucratic delays on procurement processes. It means that municipalities may appoint a service provider to provide sanitisers, face masks, water tankers, and temporary shelters for the homeless people without following the long procurement processes (Arndt *et al.*, 2020:70). However, with non-advertisement of tenders, Bokwana, (2019:105) states that possibilities exist for corrupt practices to be undertaken through the appointment of friends and family without relevant capacities and expertise. Corruption has a negative effect in achieving a developmental local government agenda since resources meant to be used by municipalities in working with other stakeholders in meeting needs of their communities are diverted to the wrong beneficiaries (Mbunge *et al.*, 2021:29).

The impact of COVID-19 in other countries

This section discusses the impact of COVID-19 in other countries as to assess how the pandemic has affected development within these countries.

Negative short-term economic growth

Valensisi (2020:1535) claimed that COVID-19 pandemic is expected to affect economic growth severely in Less Developing Countries (LDCs), mainly because of their vulnerabilities to external factors, such as a drop in external demand, lower commodity prices and a sharp decline in tourism activities. Jomo and Chowdhury (2020:226) emphasise that the lockdown and other preventive measures have weighed heavily on the economy, while the countercyclical policies are considered insufficient to offset the economic shock. According to the latest projections and forecast of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) (United Nations, 2023), LDCs as a group will experience a contraction of economic output. Habibi

and Zabardast (2020:101) review that GDP growth in 2020 is expected to be -1.3% and LDCs experienced economic contractions in 2020.

However, the range of GDP growth projections for 2020 is wide, from -8.5% for Kiribati to 1.5% for the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) (United Nations, 2023). United Nations (2023) adds that these projections represent a significant slowdown from 2019 for almost all LDCs, with negative consequences for their fragile macroeconomic conditions. However, Aggarwal *et al.* (2019:41) claim that the impact on short-term growth has been less severe compared with the world's average and severely affected developing regions, such as Latin America, and countries, such as India. Aggarwal *et al.* (2019:41) indicate that the dependence of LDCs on agriculture, generally a sign of their vulnerability, may have limited the impact as food production has increased in many places.

Poverty and inequality on the rise

After nearly 25 years of consistent poverty reduction, Valensisi (2020:1540) is of the view that the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to reverse that global trend, as the toll is expected to be worse for the poor and vulnerable groups. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report (2020), extreme poverty is expected to rise globally for the first time since 1998, from 8.4% in 2018 to 8.8% in 2020 (United Nations, 2023). The contraction of global GDP growth due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and likely increase in income inequality, will not only cause a large share of the population to slip back into extreme poverty, but it will also push those already in extreme poverty into deeper destitution (World Bank, 2020). Goldberg and Reed (2020:161) signify that there is substantial heterogeneity among LDCs, some of which had already observed rising poverty before the crisis. For example, Goldberg and Reed (2020:161) aver that the poverty rate increased from 36% in 2000 to 52% in 2018 in Angola and from 31% in 2000 to 36% in 2017 in Sao Tome and Principe.

Narayanan *et al.* (2019:101) are of the view that the aggregate poverty incidence in LDCs, which is estimated to have registered 37% level for women and 36.4% for men in 2019, is expected to increase by 2.4% points for both groups. As such, Narayanan *et al.* (2019:101) stress that the COVID-19 pandemic will render it extremely difficult for LDCs to achieve developmental goals by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic is also expected to worsen inequalities, both vertical and horizontal, by disrupting the employment of low-skilled labour more severely, slowing down remittance flows and limiting employment prospects for less educated workers for several years to come (Furceri *et al.*, 2020:138).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An exploratory and mixed-method research study was conducted with an ethics clearance issued by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Venda reference number **SMS/21/HRM/02/01189**. Mixed method research refers to a method of collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. 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 article is empirical in that it collected data through reviewing existing literature, policies, questionnaires, interview schedule and relevant reports. The empirical data was collected from 200 respondents, which included the Executive Mayor, Municipal Manager, Manager of Integrated Development Planning, 10 IDP officials; Manager of Local Economic Development, 10 LED officials, Manager of Communication, 20 Community Development Workers (CDW), 20 Traditional leaders, 20 Ward councillors, 20 Members of SANCO, and 95 selected community members. The respondents from the Municipality were selected purposively due the kind of knowledge they possess while the community members were selected randomly. The data collected through questionnaires were analysed through International Business Machinery (IBM): Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 28.0 and the information was presented in the form of tables, followed by frequencies and percentages using inferential statistics.

Pragmatism research paradigm was adopted for this article in that it advocates for the use of mixed method research. The focus of the study which resulted into this article was in a Vhembe District Municipality in the Limpopo province of South Africa, which comprises four local municipalities, namely, Thulamela Local Municipality, Collins Chabane Local Municipality, Musina Local Municipality and Makhado Local Municipality.

FINDINGS

Data was collected through interviews and questionnaires and analysed through various qualitative and quantitative means. The ensuing section of the article discusses the findings from the selected respondents starting with the quantitative data analysed thematically through tables, frequencies, and inferential statistics.

Inequalities and vulnerabilities

	Response	Frequencies	Percentages
1	Strongly agree	70	35%
2	Agree	87	43.5%
3	Not sure	10	5%
4	Disagree	29	14.5%
5	Strongly disagree	04	2%
	Total	200	100%

Table 1.1 *Inequalities within Vhembe District Municipality are being exposed and exacerbated by COVID 19, as poor and vulnerable are unable to protect themselves.*

The data presented in table 1.1 above, indicates that 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 poor and vulnerable

are unable to protect themselves, followed by 70 of the respondents which constitute 35% strongly agreed with the statement. Ten respondents which constitute 5% were not sure with the statement, while 29 which constitute 14.5% disagreed and 04 which constitute 2% strongly disagreed with the statement. Conclusion can be drawn based on the above data that 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 relies on the government for sustainability. Laborde, Martin and Vos (2021:132) on the literature review of concurs that the COVID-19 crisis poses an additional threat to the food security of millions of South Africans who were already food insecure before the outbreak of COVID-19. This suggests that there has been inequality which mostly affects poor people in Vhembe District Municipality.

Capacity of the local economy post COVID-19 pandemic

	Response	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Strongly agree	87	43.5%
2	Agree	101	50.5%
3	Not sure	05	2.5%
4	Disagree	07	3.5%
5	Strongly degree	0	0%
	Total	200	100%

Table 1.2 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 which constitute 50.5% 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, while 87 which 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, conclusion can be drawn that majority of the respondents agreed that capacity of the local economy at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic will be significantly impaired and recovery will take longer. This suggests that local economy is mostly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will take time for it to recover in the post COVID-19 pandemic. The study suggests that the Municipality should focus on funding affected businesses to continue to operate and build economy through employment creation and reduce inflation rate.

	Response	Frequencies	Percentages
1	Strongly agree	106	53%
2	Agree	85	42.5%
3	Not sure	05	2.5%
4	Disagree	04	2%
5	Strongly disagree	0	0%
	Total	200	100%

Table 1.3 Municipal budget has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

According to the results from the respondents on table 1.3 above, majority at 106 which constitute 53% strongly agreed that municipal financial budget has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, while 85 which constitute 42.5% agreed with the statement. Five of the respondents which constitute 2.5% were not sure with the statement while on the other hand, four which constitute 2% disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. Based on the above information, it can be concluded that majority of the respondents agreed that Municipal budget has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that financial budget of the municipality was used to find solutions to overcome COVID-19 pandemic. The article also suggests that budget for the implementation of the NDP was affected by the COVID-19 as the Municipality had to finance software contractors to enable its employees to work from home and also provide data and cell phone allowances for the employees.

COVID-19 crisis on the NDP goals

	Response	Frequencies	Percentages
1	Strongly agree	81	40.5%
2	Agreed	110	55%
3	Not sure	05	2.5%
4	Disagree	04	2%
5	Strongly disagree	0	0%
	Total	200	100%

Table 1.4 The COVID-19 crisis has put more pressure on the goals of the NDP by increasing unemployment, economic decline, corruption and nonattendance of schools through lockdown regulations

Table 1.4 above indicates that majority of the respondents at 110 which constitute 55% agreed that COVID-19 crisis has put more pressure on the goals of the NDP by increasing unemployment, causing economic decline, corruption, and nonattendance of schools through lockdown regulations, while 81 which constitute 40.5% strongly agreed with the statement.

Five of the respondents which constitute 2.5% were not sure with the statement while on the other hand, four which constitute 2% disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. One can make a conclusion that majority of the respondents agreed that COVID-19 crisis has put more pressure on the goals of the NDP by increasing unemployment, economic decline, corruption and nonattendance of schools through lockdown regulations. This contradicts the statement of Du Toit and Neves (2014:833) that the NDP proposes a development path that enables broader access to livelihood opportunities, either through employment or self-employment, on the back of a growing and more inclusive economy. This suggests that COVID-19 affected the implementation of the NDP 2030 due to the lockdown regulations which led to the closure of business and economic activities.

NDP with pre-existing vulnerabilities pre-COVID-19 pandemic

	Response	Frequencies	Percentages
1	Strongly agree	106	53%
2	Agree	66	33%
3	Not sure	05	2.5%
4	Disagree	22	11%
5	Strongly disagree	01	0.5%
	Total	200	100%

Table 1.5 COVID-19 found the NDP with pre-existing vulnerabilities that are now being exacerbated

The data presented in table 1.5 indicates that majority at 106 which constitute 53% strongly agreed that COVID-19 found the NDP with pre-existing vulnerabilities that are now being exacerbated while on the other hand, 66 which constitute 33% agreed with the statement. Five which constitute 2.5% of the respondents were not sure with the statement while, 22 which constitute 11% disagree and only 01 which constitutes 0.5% strongly disagreed with the statement. The above data indicates that majority of the respondents at 172 which constitute 86% agreed that COVID-19 found the NDP with pre-existing vulnerabilities that are now being exacerbated. This suggests that there were already challenges that were affecting the implementation of the NDP even before COVID-19 pandemic. National Planning Commission (2012:32) concurs that progress towards achieving the NDP’s main goals has been slow compared to what was expected. There has generally been lack of capacity and incompetence in the Municipality and government in general.

What is the implication of COVID-19 on the National Development Plan 2030?

The data collected through questionnaires was supplemented through data collected through interviews with municipal officials. And such data was analysed thematically as done in the ensuing section of the article. The question sought to find out the implication of COVID-19 on the NDP 2030, and participants revealed the following:

Participant A:

The implementation of the NDP 2030 requires a healthy nation for human resource and economic development. The goals of NDP 2030 were affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 as the focus of government was only on finding solutions to control the spread of the pandemic. It suffices to note that the pace of the implementation was slow before the outbreak of COVID-19. Although the pace towards achieving the goals of the NDP 2030 was slow, it was worsened by the lockdown regulations to control the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant B:

COVID-19 limited the standards which were set to meet the goals of the NDP 2030. Funds which were budgeted to implement the goals of the plan were affected as the government was focusing on using available resources to fight against the spread of the pandemic. Many people lost their jobs and cannot afford municipal services. This also affected the target of NDP 2030 on creating full employment by 2030 as many people lost their jobs and become job seekers. Businesses which were making enough profits and increasing employment opportunities were affected by the pandemic and many of them are closed down. During lockdown regulations, infrastructure developments were not taking place as the movement and gathering of the people were forbidden. COVID-19 provided a skill of working from home for the municipal employees and be able to provide the best performance without being at the office.

Participant C:

COVID-19 disturbed the implementation of the NDP as there was no time to focus on development during the pandemic. Funds which were allocated to implement the goals of the NDP 2030 were used to find solutions in fighting against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Due to lack of income in the Municipality, LED is no longer able to provide infrastructure, which is entitled to, because of the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic saved the budget of the meetings which were arranged to take place outside the office as Microsoft teams was the channel of the meetings in the Municipality.

Participant D:

The COVID-19 pandemic affected economic growth which led to job losses to people who were employed before the outbreak of the pandemic. COVID-19 slowed down the key priorities of the NDP 2030 such as education, health and human settlement as the Municipality used funds to find solutions to control the spread of the pandemic. Lockdown regulations affected the implementation of the successful NDP by 2030 as there is no time to focus on achieving the goals of the NDP.

Participant E:

COVID-19 affected the implementation of the NDP which was aimed to be achieved by 2030 in Vhembe District Municipality and South Africa. The budget of the municipality to achieve the goals of the NDP is affected by COVID-19 pandemic and it will take time for the municipality to recover its budget after the pandemic.

Participant F:

COVID-19 impacted the implementation of the goals of the NDP which were aimed to be implemented in all spheres of government. The targets of the NDP were being achieved before the pandemic although they were not fully implemented. The outbreak of COVID-19 worsens the situation as the Municipality was using available resources to fight against the pandemic and not focusing on the implementation of the NDP 2030.

Participant G:

COVID-19 impacted the implementation of the goals of NDP 2030 as there was lack of time to achieve the goals during lockdown regulations. Private companies which were making profit before the pandemic are closed because of lockdown regulations which impacted the process of many businesses. Many people lost their jobs as businesses were closing and the standard of living was low as people was restricted to move from one area to another as a mechanism to control the spread of disease.

Participant H:

COVID-19 found the NDP with more vulnerabilities as the goals were not implemented properly even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the skilled officials who are responsible for the implementation of the NDP died in the Municipality which will affect the continuation of the implementation of the NDP 2030. Although the pandemic was limiting the time for proper implementation of the NDP, employees in the Municipality gained the skills of working from home without physical supervision and attending meetings online.

Participant I:

COVID-19 came with emergency disaster which is needed to control the spread of COVID-19. In Vhembe District Municipality, the budget which was allocated to achieve the goals of the NDP was re-directed to COVID-19 disaster management to find solutions to control the spread of the pandemic.

Participant J:

COVID-19 affected the Municipal budget which was aimed at achieving the goals and objectives of the NDP 2030. The municipal budget is used to compensate affected businesses so that they can continue to operate during lockdown regulations. The preceding discussion supplemented the findings of the quantitative data which indicated in the main that COVID-19 had a negative impact on the NDP 2030. However, the situation regarding the weak implementation of the NDP predates the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant A, G, C, F and H indicate that although the goals of the NDP 2030 were not implemented accordingly, COVID-19 worsen the situation due to the lockdown regulations which resulted with lack of time to focus on the goals of the plan. Participant B and D show that COVID-19 pandemic affected economic growth which led to the increased in unemployment rate due to the collapse of many businesses due to the lockdown regulations. Participant D adds that COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the key priorities of the NDP 2030 such as education, health care and human settlements. Participant A, D, E and F indicate that there was no time for the implementation of the NDP as the focus of the government was on finding solutions to control the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Participant A, D, E, F, I and J reveal that the budget for implementing NDP 2030 was re-directed to fund COVID-19 emergency disaster to fight against the spread of the pandemic. Participant J adds that the Municipal budget is also used to compensate businesses that are to close, so that they can continue to operate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic Recovery Plan should be fostered to address the impact of COVID-19 on the South African economy. This indicates that the Vhembe District Municipality should focus on employment creation for its local communities. Employment creation should be based on the workers with low education levels as they are much more affected by COVID-19 than workers with secondary or tertiary education. 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 proper implementation of the NDP 2030. Municipality should fund businesses that are closed so that they can re-open and contribute to the economic recovery to achieve the implementation of the NDP 2030. Municipalities should strive to improve and increase their sources of revenues to supplement their struggling budgets.

Municipalities should overcome pressure which was brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and focus on the mechanisms to achieve the successful implementation of the NDP 2030. Municipalities should focus more on low and middle-income areas as they are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. Gathering of people should be allowed to enable community participation in municipal decision making for a proper implementation of the NDP 2030. Municipalities should develop policies dealing with social and economic effects, as well as ensuring a secure and sustainable longer-term recovery after COVID-19 pandemic. Municipalities should ensure a balanced and inclusive recovery through strategic investment, regional development and improving living standards of its communities. Municipalities should strengthen partnerships between private sector and local municipalities within its jurisdiction to improve the implementation of the NDP 2030. Municipalities should monitor and evaluate the goals that have been achieved so that the direction of what to start with, can be adopted. Local communities and other relevant stakeholders must be at the centre of all municipal policy making and implementation including the NDP 2030.

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