

TISANE CULTURAL VILLAGE: A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY-DRIVEN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (2025)

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Executive Summary

Tisane Cultural Village / Hlako Resort is a dynamic cultural tourism development founded by Mr. Dinyalo Elias Mampane and strategically located at the foot of Hlako Mountain, adjacent to Lobethal Primary School. It is situated in the picturesque landscape of Sekhukhune region. The project was initiated in 2009 and further supported by an initial investment of twenty million rand, the project is later recapitalized with an additional twenty-seven million rand to enhance its infrastructure and service capacity. The facility boasts a wide range of features, including a main hall, kitchen, dining hall, ten chalets, and an administration block. It actively hosts cultural events, wedding celebrations, picnics, and outdoor activities, while also offering accommodation and swimming pool facilities. As an operational entity managed by a dedicated trust, the cultural village partners with local government bodies, such as the Sekhukhune District Municipality, to host major events like the Tourism Indaba, thereby promoting local culture and sustainable community tourism (Mbaiwa, 2005).

Introduction

Tisane Cultural Village / Hlako Resort is a thriving cultural tourism destination founded by Mr. Dinyalo Elias Mampane. The project is strategically located at the foot of Hlako Mountain, adjacent to Lobethal Primary School, and serves as a vibrant hub for cultural events, celebrations, and diverse recreational activities, including rich heritage and history. Initiated in 2009, the village initially secured an investment of twenty million rand (R20 million) and has since been further strengthened with an additional twenty-seven-million-rand (R27 million) in recapitalization. This financial boost has enabled the development of key facilities including a main hall, kitchen, dining hall, ten chalets, and an administration block, all designed to enhance visitor and customer experience and support community engagement (Jones, 2005).

Operated by a dedicated trust, Tisane Cultural Village not only offers a venue for weddings, picnics, and outdoor events but also provides accommodation and leisure amenities such as a swimming pool, and for outdoor events such as music festival. In partnership with local authorities such as the Sekhukhune District Municipality, the project is a crucial component in hosting major events, including the Tourism Indaba and other in the future, thereby promoting local culture and sustainable tourism. As it continues to evolve, the village is facing the dual challenge of maintaining high-quality service delivery while enhancing its capacity and impact on the local community and tourism sector (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

Review

1. Conceptualizing Cultural Tourism and Cultural Villages

The academic on cultural tourism emphasizes the importance of preserving local heritage and fostering authentic experiences that resonate with both residents and visitors. Cultural villages are increasingly viewed as vital nodes that not only safeguard traditional practices but also stimulate local economic development. It is argued that such initiatives provide a distinct benefit: they serve as platforms for cultural expression and as catalysts for sustainable tourism growth, reinforcing community identity while diversifying the local economy.

Despite its robust infrastructural development, Tisane Cultural Village faces several challenges that could impede its long-term success. Key issues include the need to enhance operational sustainability and expand marketing strategies to increase public awareness and consistent patronage. Additionally, coordinating multi-faceted events and maintaining high-quality service delivery across diverse offerings present ongoing management challenges. There is also a critical need for stronger community engagement to ensure that local cultural practices are effectively integrated into the community tourism experience. Addressing these challenges is essential to maximize the project's potential as a cultural hub and a driver of regional economic growth.

2. Infrastructure Investment and Financial Recapitalization

A recurrent theme in tourism studies is the crucial role of infrastructure and financial investment in the development of cultural tourism projects. The case of Tisane Cultural Village, initially backed by a twenty-million-rand investment and later recapitalized with an additional twenty-seven million rand, illustrates the significant capital required to develop comprehensive tourism facilities. This suggests that robust funding is essential for the maintenance of the established key amenities, such as administrative buildings, event halls, accommodation chalets, and recreational facilities. These investments not only enhance the visitor's experience but also enhance operational efficiency, resulting in the long-term viability of cultural tourism destinations.

3. Community Engagement and Cultural Preservation

Experts in the community cultural tourism field assert that genuine community involvement is essential for cultural tourism projects to thrive. Authentic cultural tourism relies on the involvement of local communities in both the planning and execution stages, ensuring that the portrayal of cultural traditions remains true to its roots. In this context, initiatives such as Tisane Cultural Village demonstrate the potential to enhance cultural preservation and tourism development, thus fostering a sense of ownership among community members. This integration is crucial for preserving the authenticity of cultural displays while simultaneously providing socio-economic benefits.

4. Operational Challenges and Management Strategies

Managing a multifaceted cultural tourism facility involves addressing several operational challenges, a topic that is well-documented in current research. Effective management

strategies must balance the various needs of event hosting, accommodation, and recreational activities, while ensuring quality service delivery. Studies demonstrate the importance of strategic planning and adaptive management in overcoming challenges such as market fluctuations, seasonal variability, and the potential tension between commercialization and cultural authenticity. The operational model of Tisane Cultural Village, which is overseen by a dedicated trust, is indicative of broader trends in the industry where structured governance and clear management frameworks are considered essential for sustainable success.

5. Public-Private Partnerships and Government Collaboration

The community tourism development emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors, more in partnership between government and rural communities. Partnerships with government bodies, such as the collaboration with the Sekhukhune District Municipality in hosting major events like the Tourism Indaba, are instrumental in providing regulatory support, enhancing marketing efforts, and ensuring that cultural tourism projects align with broader regional development strategies. These partnerships are often associated with improved infrastructure, improved resource allocation, and increased credibility in the competitive tourism industry.

This assessment indicates that cultural tourism projects, such as Tisane Cultural Village, operate at the intersection of cultural preservation, economic development, and sustainable tourism practices for rural local economic growth. Although significant financial investments and strategic partnerships are essential, the success of such initiatives also hinges on the ability to engage local communities and manage operational issues effectively, including getting support from government. In the future, an assessment of a long-term socio-economic impact, and develop models that integrate community feedback into dynamic management strategies remains crucial.

This will support a holistic approach to developing community cultural tourism projects, one that blends financial stability, community involvement, and effective governance to create sustainable and authentic cultural experiences, not forgetting government support at a municipal level.

Discussion

The development and operation of Tisane Cultural Village / Hlako Resort have highlighted critical challenges in managing stakeholder expectations, ensuring accountability in project execution, and maintaining quality standards during the transition from construction to full operation. Among the key areas of concern is the certification process for payment of work done, which has often been a source of frustration due to delays, poor workmanship, and lack of monitoring.

✓ Managing Community Expectations and Ensuring Accountability

One of the fundamental challenges in large-scale community-driven projects is managing the expectations of various stakeholders, particularly the local community. In the case of Tisane Cultural Village, many residents expected timely project completion and immediate economic benefits, including job creation and business opportunities. However, project delays, construction quality concerns, and administrative inefficiencies led to disappointment and eroded trust in the process.

A significant contributor to these issues has been the role of the engineering team, contractors, and sponsors in ensuring timely and high-quality work. Instances of poor workmanship, lack of proper quality assurance, and delayed monitoring have caused setbacks in the project's progress. Additionally, the prolonged non-payment of local laborers sometimes extending up to six months has further fueled tensions and cast doubt on the project's management.

✓ **The Role of the Users in the Certification Process for Payment**

One of the key lessons from this project is the need for greater accountability in payment certification processes. Typically, in construction contracts, payments are released based on certification from the engineering and project management teams. However, in community-driven projects like Tisane, where a trust or local governing body represents the beneficiaries, it is crucial to allow the users (or trustees) to have a direct role in verifying the completion and quality of work before payments are approved.

To address this issue, the contract between the client and the contractor should include an addendum that mandates user participation in the certification process. This would allow the trust, representing the interests of the community, to co-sign and confirm satisfaction with the completed work before funds are released. This approach has several advantages:

Improved Quality Assurance: The involvement of users ensures that any defects or incomplete work are identified before payments are made, reducing the risk of substandard construction.

Increased Accountability: Contractors and engineers would be more motivated to meet quality standards, knowing that final payments depend on approval from both project managers and community representatives.

Enhanced Trust and Transparency: By allowing the trust or community representatives to play a role in financial decisions, the project gains greater legitimacy, and concerns about corruption or mismanagement can be minimized.

Prevention of Payment Disputes: In cases where work is incomplete or defective, withholding payment until corrections are made provides leverage to ensure contractors fulfill their obligations.

✓ **The Role of the Sponsor in Ensuring Project Sustainability**

Beyond construction oversight, the sponsor has a critical role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project. This includes:

- ✓ Providing capital injections for start-up costs, ensuring that the trust managing the facility has adequate financial resources to cover operational expenses.
- ✓ Mentoring and supporting the trust and management team, helping them build the necessary skills and knowledge to run the facility efficiently.
- ✓ Monitoring the effective use of funds and project resources to prevent mismanagement or financial instability in the early stages of operation.

To improve the success of community-driven projects like Tisane Cultural Village, it is crucial to integrate the local trust or community representatives into the certification process for

payments. This ensures that funds are only disbursed for satisfactory work, holding contractors accountable and maintaining high-quality construction standards. Additionally, greater municipal involvement, stronger sponsor oversight, and structured mentorship for the trust will contribute to the long-term sustainability and positive impact of the project. This can be implemented to all other projects of this nature in the future, to ensure transparency.

Furthermore, the situation is compounded by systemic issues in the management of local labor. There have been instances where local laborers have not received their salaries in a timely manner, with delays extending up to six months. Such prolonged non-payment not only undermines the morale and economic stability of the workers but also casts a negative light on the overall project management. The failure to honor financial commitments to laborers indicates a broader lack of accountability and oversight, which can have dropping effects on both the quality of construction and the trust placed in the project by the local community.

The sponsor's role is crucial in this dynamic. As the primary financial backer and visionary behind the project, the sponsor is expected to enforce strict quality control measures and ensure that the engineering team remains accountable for its deliverables. However, the recurring delays and evident shortcomings in quality monitoring suggest that there is a significant gap in oversight. This shortfall not only hampers the project's progress but also erodes the community's confidence in the project's management, potentially jeopardizing its long-term viability.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings on Tisane Cultural Village / Hlako Resort demonstrates that while the project holds considerable promise as a cultural tourism destination bolstered by significant financial investments and a strategic vision it faces critical challenges that must be addressed to ensure sustainable success. The analysis reveals that the transition from the construction phase to full operational status has been marred by difficulties in managing community expectations. Local stakeholders anticipated timely and high-quality developments; however, delays and subpar workmanship have led to growing disillusionment.

Key issues identified include persistent delays attributed to the engineering team, a lack of rigorous monitoring and quality assurance, and inadequate accountability mechanisms. These challenges are further compounded by systemic problems such as delayed payment of local labor, which not only undermines worker morale but also damages the project's reputation within the community. The role of the project sponsor is crucial; their commitment to enforcing quality control and transparent communication is essential for restoring trust and integrating project outcomes with community expectations.

For Tisane Cultural Village / Hlako Resort to fully realize its potential as a sustainable and authentic cultural tourism hub, it is imperative that the project management team implements robust oversight measures and adopts adaptive strategies that cater to both operational demands and community needs. Future initiatives should prioritize enhanced quality assurance processes, timely financial disbursements, and proactive stakeholder engagement to bridge the gap between initial expectations and project delivery. Addressing these challenges will not only benefit the local community but also provide a replicable model for similar cultural tourism projects seeking to balance cultural preservation with economic development.

Lessons Learned

The experience of developing Tisane Cultural Village / Hlako Resort provides several critical insights for future community-driven cultural tourism projects:

- **Enhanced Municipal and its entities Engagement**

Observed Issue: The project, despite being community-initiated, experienced a noticeable gap in full local municipal participation. Limited involvement from local authorities affected resource mobilization, regulatory support, and alignment with regional development strategies.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Municipalities and entities should adopt proactive engagement strategies, such as regular consultations and joint planning meetings with community leaders and project stakeholders, to fully comprehend and support community initiatives.
- ✓ Providing technical assistance, streamlined approval processes, and financial incentives can lead to more projects of this nature.
- ✓ Establishing dedicated municipal liaison offices or task forces focused on cultural tourism could facilitate closer collaboration and ensure that community-driven projects receive comprehensive support.

- **Sponsor Responsibility and Strategic Capital Injection**

Observed Issue: The role of the project sponsor is crucial, yet there have been challenges in ensuring that the funded project meets all suitability aspects. Additionally, delays in capital injection for the trust managing the project have impacted operational sustainability.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Sponsors must adhere to thorough due diligence and oversight to ensure that projects are not only adequately funded but also aligned with long-term strategic objectives.
- ✓ Timely and sufficient capital injections are essential for the trust to manage operations smoothly and to cover start-up costs, which in turn supports sustainability.
- ✓ The sponsor should establish clear accountability guidelines and performance metrics, ensuring that each phase of the project adheres to quality standards.

- **Mentoring and Capacity Building for Trusts and Management**

Observed Issue: A lack of consistent mentoring and management support has contributed to operational challenges, particularly during the transition from construction to full operational status.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Establish formal mentoring programs for trusts and project management teams to build capacity, enhance leadership skills, and share best practices in project execution and community engagement.
- ✓ Regular training workshops, performance reviews, and external audits can help maintain high operational standards and encourage a culture of continuous improvement.
- ✓ Creating a network of successful cultural tourism projects can facilitate peer mentoring, allowing project leaders to exchange experiences and strategies for overcoming common challenges.

In conclusion, fostering greater local municipal involvement, ensuring rigorous sponsor oversight with adequate capital support, and investing in the mentoring of management teams are pivotal strategies. These lessons learned can guide future initiatives to achieve sustainability, meet community expectations, and serve as robust models for community-driven cultural tourism development. Municipality must document this model and use it for future related projects and improve on it.

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