

## Entrepreneurial Challenges of Marginalised Women Making Souvenirs in Alexandra Township in Johannesburg

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### Abstract

Alexandra township in Johannesburg is the most densely populated and one of the poorest in South Africa. Women living in the township are economically marginalised, having rare economic opportunities for employment or self-employment. This study examined the entrepreneurial challenges marginalised women in Alexandra face in making souvenirs for the tourism trade. The study adopted a qualitative approach based on a four-stage sequential design. The data was collected through focus groups, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and non-participant observations with the 24 women actively involved in souvenir-making. It was found that entrepreneurial challenges facing women making souvenirs in Alexandra include lack of access to funding, competition from mass-produced Chinese crafts, lack of availability of essential resources (i.e., electricity, machinery, safe working spaces), lack of access to tourism markets, and crime and corruption. The research findings are expected to assist the South African government, Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), and various women initiatives to develop more effective ways of supporting marginalised women in townships in overcoming identified business challenges, ultimately leading to their empowerment.

**Keywords:** Souvenir-making; entrepreneurial challenges; women empowerment; marginalised women; Alexandra; Johannesburg

### Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been recognised as a catalyst for women's empowerment, especially for marginalised women in the Global South with fewer or no access to resources and opportunities to improve their lives (Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Althalathini et al., 2020; Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015; Maphalla et al., 2009; Misango & Ongiti, 2013). According to Fairlie & Fossen (2018), the majority of marginalised women venture into entrepreneurship as necessity entrepreneurs in order to escape poverty. They start a business as a means of survival, and not as a career choice (Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Althalathini et al., 2020; Goyal & Parkash, 2011).

In Africa, women's participation in entrepreneurship takes two main forms: reselling (i.e., goods, fruits, and vegetables) or utilising acquired traditional cultural skills. The latter is apparent in the provision of traditional services (i.e., sewing traditional attires and hair braiding) or making and selling new culturally inspired products (traditional food, beadwork, arts and crafts, souvenirs, etc.). Traditional arts and crafts, or handicrafts (i.e., woven baskets, reed sleeping mats, grass brooms, beadwork, necklaces, bangles, earrings, and traditional clothing), make up 45% of all women-owned small businesses in Africa (Adam & Shackleton, 2016; Matsenjwa & Musiiwa, 2016; Misango & Ongiti, 2013; Oni, 2018). This is attributed to tourist interest in local handicrafts, which not only contributes to preservation and continuity of the traditional cultural heritage of a given society, but also adds value to the authentic experience that tourists have when visiting the region (Benson, 2014; Ivanovic, 2008).

In South Africa the art and craft industry (formal and informal) has become an important component of the country's travel and tourism-led SMME economy, directly benefiting from the growth of tourism sector (Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015; Rogerson, 2006). Selling traditional arts and crafts as souvenirs to tourists provides marginalised women with an opportunity to participate in income-generating activities, leading to poverty alleviation and job creation, especially in poverty-stricken townships (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015; Nambiar et al., 2020). Townships are areas built during the apartheid regime on the outskirts of cities historically allocated to Africans, Coloureds, and Indians. They were designed as dormitories for the working population not allowed to stay overnight in the towns in order to exclude them not only racially but socially and economically (Nambiar et al., 2020). The initial lack of mainstream economic activities in the townships provided opportunities for the development of the informal, second or grey economy, exclusively relying on cash circulation and informal, non-registered businesses (Moagi et al., 2021). Most women operating small businesses in South African townships are involved in informal trading (Abisuga-Oyekunle & Fillis, 2017; Mandipaka, 2014).

Despite women-owned businesses being dominant in South African townships, they face a variety of challenges which hinder their growth. Some of these challenges are direct results of the lack of asset ownership, finance and funding opportunities, access to markets, skills development, training and education, mentorship, and networking events (Akhalwaya & Havenga, 2012; Jacob, 2021; Moagi et al., 2021; Oni, 2018). Apart from these general entrepreneurial challenges recorded in the literature, there is currently no research on the entrepreneurial challenges experienced by marginalised women engaging in souvenir-making for tourism trade in South African townships.

Alexandra provides an interesting case study for a few reasons. The township is adjacent to Sandton, Africa's wealthiest economic and financial powerhouse and a popular urban, shopping, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) tourism destination in South Africa. In contrast, Alexandra is the most densely populated township in the Gauteng province and amongst the poorest townships in South Africa. Notwithstanding notable government efforts and ongoing development projects, Alexandra never managed to capitalise on potential economic opportunities arising from its proximity to Sandton. Therefore, in this context, the aim of the paper is to present a case study on the entrepreneurial challenges of women operating small souvenir-making businesses in Alexandra township in Johannesburg.

## Literature review

### *Women entrepreneurship in the Global South*

In the Global South, the patriarchal system still dominates in different regions, especially in rural and peri-urban areas (Adisa et al., 2019; Jaim, 2021; Kapinga et al., 2018; Wolf & Frese,

2018; Xheneti et al., 2019). In many patriarchal societies, the involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities is considered taboo, preventing them from achieving any meaningful form of independence (Panda, 2018). Patriarchal societies view women's independence as problematic since it contradicts a traditional separation of roles whereby a woman is regarded as a homemaker and a man as the head and provider of the family (Bastian et al., 2018). Traditional societies view women as weak in many aspects of business operations. Not having the same access to business opportunities as their male counterparts (i.e., business funding, personal loans, personal assets) makes it difficult for women to succeed (Goyal & Parkash, 2011). These barriers limit women's aspirations to grow and expand their business ventures because being a successful businesswoman is not respectable in patriarchal societies (Wolf & Frese, 2018). In addition, men feel intimidated by a woman's independence and purposefully discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurship (Akhawaya & Havenga, 2012). Women are often raised to believe that they only have the limited roles of a caregiver and a mother, resulting in them not having enough support and confidence to run and grow their businesses (Adom et al., 2018; Bastian et al., 2018; Wolf & Frese, 2018; Vossenber, 2013). In addition, many government institutions and laws discriminate against women entrepreneurs.

Apart from being discriminated against by the traditional norms and laws, women who manage to start their own businesses must balance their entrepreneurial activities and traditional household roles to avoid family conflicts (Adom et al., 2018; Akhawaya & Havenga, 2012). The burden of balancing work and family roles often leads to some women abandoning their entrepreneurship ambitions to take care of their households (Panda, 2018; Vossenber, 2013). Furthermore, women entrepreneurs are often intimidated, and their creditability is questioned (Erogul et al., 2021). Society treats them as outcasts because their success as financially independent women clashes with their traditional role as homemakers (Nambiar et al., 2020; Nambiar, 2015). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the situation even further. Many women have taken care of their household and entrepreneurship activities while navigating through the limitations imposed by COVID-19 related restrictions (Ayatakshi-Endow & Steele, 2021).

Despite prevalent community resistance, the role of women in creating, running, and growing businesses is fundamental for overall economic growth, poverty alleviation, and job creation in many countries (Makena et al., 2014; Nziku & Struthers, 2018). Ample evidence exists of the substantial economic contribution of women entrepreneurs to society as they spend most of their income on household expenses (i.e., children's education, family groceries, medical services, etc.). This, in turn, drives economic growth in many developing countries as their income filters back into the local economy (Althalathini et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2021).

Most of these women use their traditional cultural knowledge to make a living resulting in their businesses sharing similar products and activities (Adom et al., 2018; Ratten & Ferreira, 2017; Xheneti et al., 2019). This, however, results in a lack of diversification of products and skills, with crafts businesses concentrated in the highly clustered and competitive informal sector in their respective townships (Pret & Cogan, 2019). Consequently, the clustering and competitiveness of the sector jeopardises the tourism potential for local employment and income as an effective sustainable development strategy for previously marginalised areas (Moscardo, 2014).

### ***Entrepreneurial challenges of souvenir-making***

Across the Global South, women entrepreneurs involved in souvenir-making face similar business challenges summarised in Table 1 below. All the listed challenges not only jeopardise the survival of women-led households but also discourage women from driving their businesses beyond necessity motivation (Panda, 2018). Selected examples best illustrate the challenges of

African women entrepreneurs in growing their souvenir businesses. In Kenya, women entrepreneurs cannot obtain funding from financial institutions because the guarantee required for external financing is beyond their creditworthiness (Harris, 2014). The institutionalised discrimination against women entrepreneurs is evident in banks requesting to speak to women's husbands or male business partners, denying them the possibility of financial independence (Mwobobia, 2012). In Tanzania, women also have difficulties with financial institutions, unable to secure start-up capital to expand, market, and diversify their product offerings (Benson, 2014). According to a study conducted by Halkias et al. (2011) in Nigeria, in addition to the challenges in securing finances, women entrepreneurs have difficulty finding a proper location where they can sell their products. In Botswana, women involved in informal trading fear losing their goods due to crime preventing them from generating enough sales to support themselves and their families. In addition, they face intense competition from fake goods, mainly from China, and problems with transportation to craft markets (Ama et al., 2014).

Table 1: Key business challenges and related literature

Challenges	Implications	Countries	References
Patriarchal culture	Hinders economic independence Women restricted to traditional roles Low confidence in operating a business	Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, India, Ethiopia, South Africa, Malaysia, Pakistan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Nepal, Zimbabwe	Panda, 2018; Goyal & Parkash, 2011; Akhalwaya & Havenga, 2012; Chowdhury & Rabbani, 2013; Adom et al., 2018, Selamat & Endut, 2020
Gender discrimination	Unequal opportunities Intimidation The credibility of women-owned businesses is questioned	India, Pakistan, Kenya, South Africa; Ethiopia, Nepal, Zimbabwe	Panda, 2018; Chowdhury & Rabbani, 2013; Goyal & Parkash, 2011; Vossenber, 2013; Mwobobia, 2012; Nambiar, 2015; Nambiar et al., 2020; Nzama & Ezeuduji, 2020
Balancing work and family life	Stress due to family responsibility overload	South Africa, Ghana, Zambia, Egypt, Pakistan	Akhalwaya & Havenga, 2012; Adom et al., 2018; Panda, 2018; Chakraborty, 2019
Inadequate training and skills development	Lack of management and financial skills Lack of knowledge of product design	India, South Africa, Ethiopia,	Shah & Patel, 2017; Rogerson, 2010; Makhitha, 2017; Singh & Belwal, 2008; Dey, 2019
Financial constraints	Limited access to funding Lack of access to finance in banks due to creditworthiness	Kenya, India, Swaziland, Tanzania, Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa	Harris, 2014; Makena et al., 2014; Roostika, Wahyuningsih & Haryono, 2015; Benson, 2014; Jahan & Mohan, 2015; Arisanty et al., 2017; Maziriri, et al., 2019
Lack of basic facilities	Lack of adequate electricity Lack of technological support	India, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Bangladesh	Banik, 2017; Goyal & Parkash, 2011; Singh & Belwal, 2008; Halkias et al., 2011; Begum at al., 2019; Obiria & Maina, 2020
Inadequate access to markets	Lack of knowledge of tourists' preferences Limited craft markets	Pakistan, Egypt, Kenya, India, Botswana	Makhitha, 2017; Shah & Patel, 2017; Harris, 2014; Makhdoom & Shah, 2016; Rudhumbu, du Plessis & Maphosa, 2020
Crime and corruption	High crime and corruption negatively affect businesses	Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, India	Mwobobia, 2012; Singh & Belwal, 2008; Goyal & Parkash, 2011; Harris, 2014; Muñoz-Fernández et al, 2019

(Source: Authors)

In South Africa, most women live in extreme poverty and experience social exclusion and unemployment (Fairlie & Fossen, 2018; Irene, 2017; Mbanjwa, 2018). According to Statista (2021), the unemployment of women in South Africa is estimated at 34.3%, of which the

majority are black women concentrated in townships. Due to the geographic and economic marginalisation of women in the townships, all the stages of their businesses are operated individually, forcing women to do everything from sourcing, production, and marketing to physically selling their products (Nambiar et al., 2020). Women base their businesses on traditional craft-making skills but lack the knowledge to operate them as a business (Rogerson, 2010). Training in business management, financial management, new technology, and developing products for the tourist market is vital for the survival of women-owned small businesses (Makhitha, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of attractive design, packaging, quality, and size makes it challenging for tourists to desire to purchase the products (Rogerson, 2010). Access to markets is another threat to women-owned souvenir-making businesses. This refers to having access to customers who want to purchase their products and being well-informed about their preferences (Makhitha, 2017). Oni (2018) maintains that souvenir makers are unfamiliar with the preferences of the tourist markets, resulting in the production of large quantities of souvenirs that are not in demand by tourists or copying and mass-producing successful designs that compromise souvenir originality and cultural significance (Moagi et al., 2021).

High crime levels in South African townships constitute a significant threat to local businesses resulting in tourists' reluctance to visit certain areas because of criminal activities, run-down buildings, and overcrowding (Koens & Thomas, 2015; Malovha & Adinolfi, 2018). Finally, the government can also hinder tourism growth through corrupt activities, including the maladministration of funds and the lack of policy frameworks for tourism planning and development (Nunkoo, 2015).

### **Alexandra: Study site and situation analysis**

Alexandra township is situated in Johannesburg, the province of Gauteng, and is adjacent to Africa's wealthiest suburb, Sandton (as shown in Figure 1). Like many other townships in South Africa, Alexandra is a residential area for the poor and marginalised, characterised by extreme poverty, crime, high rates of unemployment and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS (Mbanjwa, 2018). It is difficult to estimate Alexandra's population density accurately due to outdated official census data and the informal nature of the township, with mostly two-room houses occupied by backyard shacks closely built next to one another (Mafisa, 2019). Available sources are extremely conflicting, ranging from 100 000 to 750 000 for the 6.91km<sup>2</sup> area, with the latter regarded as a more accurate reflection of the observations on the ground and aerial photographs. The overpopulation in Alexandra (100 000 people per km<sup>2</sup>) has resulted in a lack of proper sanitation, a shortage of clean water, electric wires running down the streets, and health hazards caused by piles of uncollected refuse (Leonard & Dladla, 2020).

The harsh living conditions in Alexandra are especially detrimental for women. Women in the township are exposed to many social ills, the most devastating being unemployment, social exclusion, and limited economic opportunities for female-headed households (Njiro et al., 2010). The most recent 2021 provincial statistics for Gauteng confirm that 33.9% of households in the province are female-headed (SatsSA, 2022). Women have turned to making arts and crafts using skills passed down from one generation to another to overcome hardships. To assist the Alexandra women in making a living off their traditional art and craft-making skills, the South African Government launched the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) and the Alexandra Tourism Development Project (ATDP) in 2001, whereby both projects were aimed at the renewal of Alexandra as a tourist destination (City of Johannesburg, 2018a, 2018b).

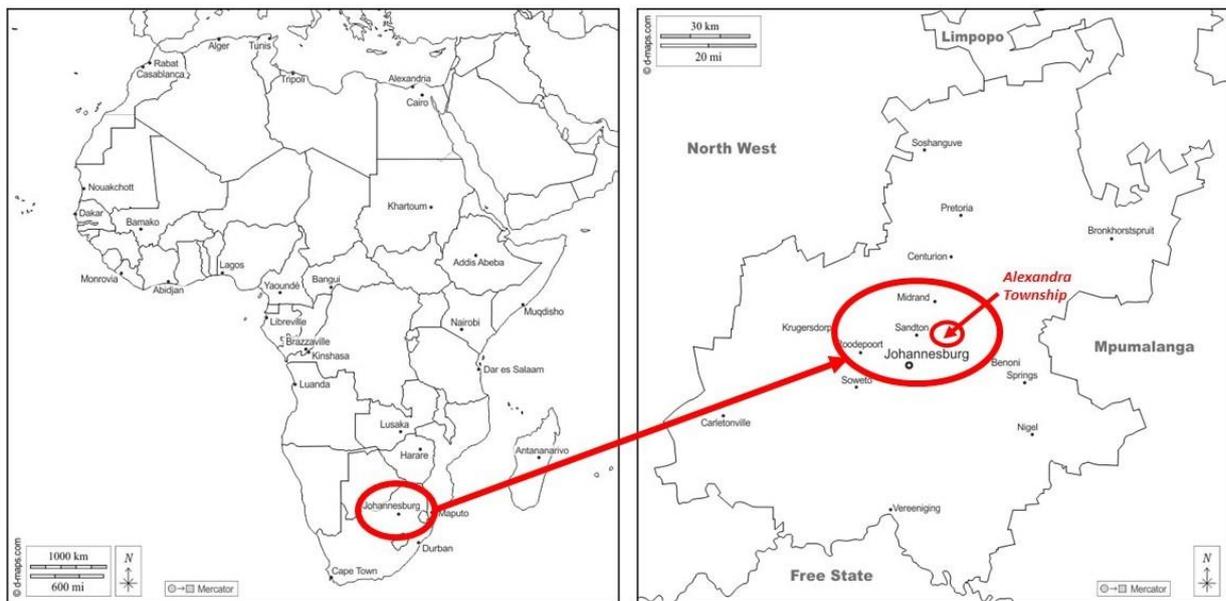


Figure 1: Location of Alexandra township (Source: Compiled by authors using maps from d-maps.com)

Apart from the two main tourist attractions, the Alexandra Heritage Museum and Nelson Mandela Yard, Alexandra township offers a creative tourism experience developed by the Maboneng Township Art Experience. This unique initiative provides tourists access to street art tours, introducing them to local musicians and artists, especially painters and sculptors. Tourists are taken on walks through gallery houses to look at the artwork, interact with the hosts, and take part in art-making workshops as part of creative tourism, a newly emerging form of cultural tourism (Booyens & Rogerson, 2019). The initiative only involves the local people to ensure benefits remain within the local communities. Khavho Travel and Tours, Mulaudzi Alexandra Tours and Ekala Eco Tours are the major tour companies conducting township tours in Alexandra. Tourists are taken to different attractions around Alexandra, the main being the Hostel, St Hubert Catholic Church, and Joe's Butchery, one of the oldest *shisa nyamas* (a Zulu phrase meaning to "burn meat") where tourists can *braai* (barbeque) and eat meat with the locals. Mulaudzi Alexandra Tours offers cycling tours around the township. Tourists also get a chance to buy locally made crafts at the Alexandra Heritage Centre, not far from Mandela's house. Though this is the case, a recent study by Leonard and Dladla (2020) on obstacles to and suggestions for successful township tourism in Alexandra Township, presented proofs of gender inequality and prejudice against women. This is due to tourism in Alexandra being regarded as a male-dominated industry, which limits the women souvenir makers' opportunity to meaningfully participate in and benefit from tourism in the township.

## Methodology

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach resulting in a 4-phase sequential research design (Fabeil, 2013; Jebb et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2018), illustrated in Figure 2. The study population comprised 24 marginalised women making and selling souvenirs in Alexandra. Each phase is discussed in more detail.

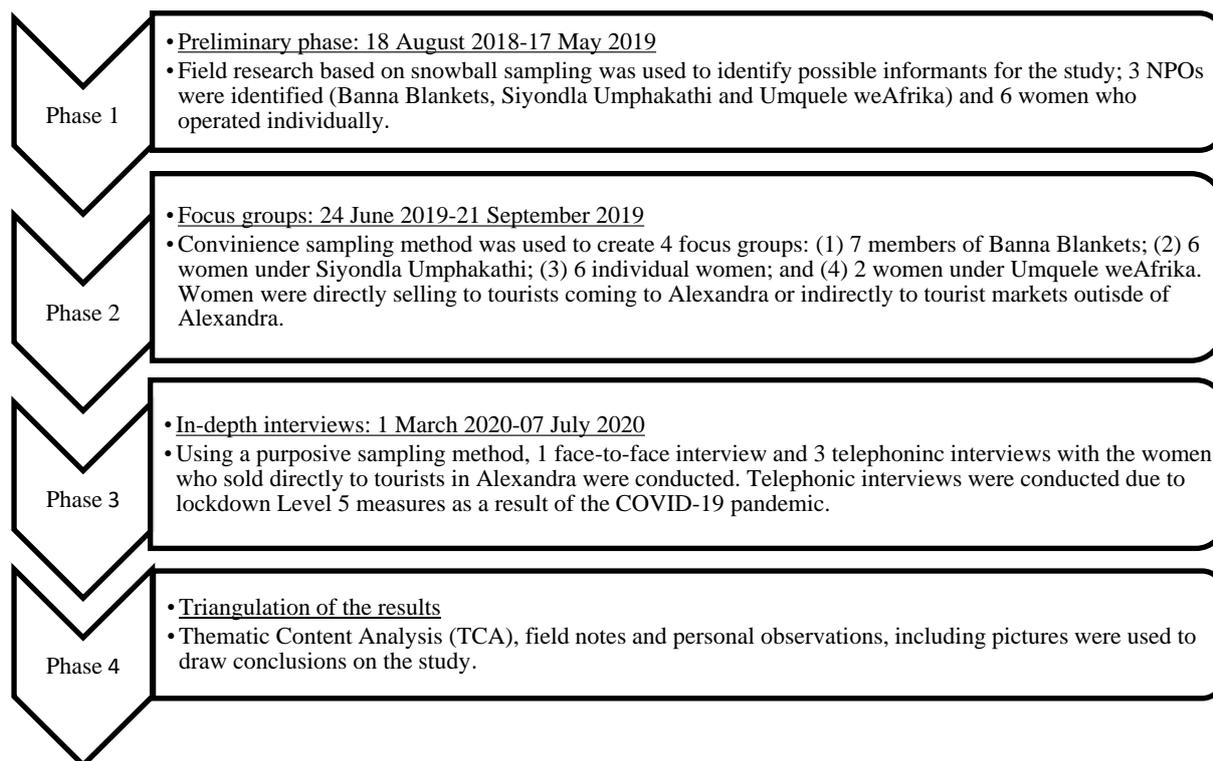


Figure 2: Summary of the four-phase sequential research design

### ***The preliminary phase***

The preliminary discovery phase was conducted between the 18th of August 2018 and the 17th of May 2019. During this period, the researcher conducted a field study collecting contacts and names of different people and organisations, which were linked to craft making, tourism and souvenir making in Alexandra township. The initial field mapping was done through a snowball sampling method, where the researcher asked one informant to recommend other informants. Before this study there was no information available on women making arts and crafts in Alexandra.

### ***Phase 2: Focus groups***

Focus group interviews were conducted between the 24th of June 2019 and 21st of September 2019 (detailed in Table 2) using the convenience sampling method based on availability of women on a particular day of discussion. The women were contacted between 1-2 weeks before each Focus group. Of the total of 24 identified women in Phase 1, 18 women participated in three focus group discussions, while the fourth group consisting of only two women is categorised as a group interview. Nevertheless, the results were included in the TCA. The majority of women (n=15) belonged to various craft based NPOs: Banna Blankets (7 women), Siyondla Umphakathi (6 women), and Umquele weAfrika (2 women), while 3 women were independent.

The focus groups were provided with the list of themes for discussion such as what types of souvenirs they are making and their motivation, what tourism-linked opportunities they have and how they utilise them, how they access the tourist markets, what are their main business challenges and what kind of government and non-government support they currently receive.

Table 2: Focus group details

	Focus group 1 Banna Blankets	Focus group 2 Siyondla umphakathi	Focus group 3 GATHA	Group interview 4 Umquele weAfrika
Number of participants	7	6	5* 3 from GATHA and 2 not part of the organisation	2
Date of focus group	24 June 2019	25 June 2019	7 July 2019	21 September 2019
Location of focus group	Extension 9, Alexandra	20 <sup>th</sup> Avenue, Alexandra	Alexandra Heritage Centre Meeting Room	Tsutsumani, Alexandra
Duration of focus group	1 hour, 9 minutes	1 hour, 4 minutes	1 hour, 40 minutes	1 hour, 17 minutes
Time that the focus group took place	14:00-15:09	14:00-15:04	15:30-16:10	13:00-14:17

### ***Phase 3: Face to face and telephonic semi-structured interviews***

The interview protocol consisted of 24 questions designed to provide a deeper understanding of the results of the TCA as well as clarity on issues arising from Focus groups. More specifically designing products for tourists, adjusting products to tourists' needs, accessing tourist markets, forging linkages with tourism companies in Alexandra, as well as issues of funding, compliance, and accessibility of local craft markets.

#### ***a) Face to face semi-structured interviews***

One-on-one interviews were therefore conducted with these women to understand their operation in and outside of Alexandra. The first face to face interview was conducted on the 1st of March 2020. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic the remaining 3 interviews were conducted telephonically between 12 June and 07 July during the Level 5-3 national lockdowns.

#### ***b) Telephonic semi-structured interviews***

The interviews were conducted telephonically during the lockdown on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2020.

### ***Phase 4: Triangulation***

Triangulation of the results incorporated the results of the TCA for the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and the field notes and personal observations collected during the first 3 phases.

### ***Data analysis***

Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was adopted in the analysis of the transcripts from focus groups and individual interviews, where similar concepts were categorised into general themes (Quinlan, 2011). The themes were further corroborated by comparison with the literature and are discussed in more detail in the following section. The data collected during fieldwork, including the focus groups, personal interviews, pictures, field notes and personal observations were consolidated to derive conclusions for the study.

## Results and discussion

### *Demographic overview*

The results convey the demographic overview of participants and the results of the TCA analysis. These are further discussed in detail below, with the demographic profiles summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondent demographic profile

	<b>Banna Blankets (which is currently under Khulani Creatives) NPO</b>	<b>Siyondla Umphakathi NPO</b>	<b>Women in Tourism in Alexandra (WTA) Association</b>	<b>Umquele weAfrika NPC</b>
<b>Number of participants (Total = 20)</b>	7	6	5	2
<b>Age</b>	27-39	63-74	33-43	45-68
<b>Number of dependents</b>	1-4	6-13	1-2	3-6
<b>The year they started craft making</b>	2014-2019	2013-2018	2015-2018	1992-1999
<b>Number of years they have been making crafts</b>	1-5 years	2-5 years	2-5 years	21-28 years
<b>Skills</b>	Sewing Crocheting Pattern making	Patching Sewing Crocheting Knitting	Beading Sewing Pattern making	Sewing Crocheting Beading
<b>Crafts produced</b>	Shopping bags, blankets, masks	Bed covers, pillowcases, traditional dolls, blankets, winter hats and scarfs, masks	African inspired beaded jewellery, earrings, bangles, photo frames, notebooks, summer beachwear, African inspired clothes.	South African culture inspired dolls
<b>Income per month</b>	R2 000 to R3 000*	R300 to R1 500	R300 to R500	R1 000 to R2 000
<b>Distribution channels</b>	Hello Africa Market place in Maboneng	Only selling to the locals	Alex Mall market Alex Heritage Museum stall	Online store: "Lemonade"

\*Exchange rate \$1= R17.77 RSA Rand on 08 November 2022 (e.g., R2000=\$112.59)

The TCA revealed that marginalised women entrepreneurs involved in souvenir-making in Alexandra township operate under different organisations, some under an NPO and some individually. Banna Blankets is an NPO established under Ratang Banna to assist orphans in Alexandra. Due to unemployment, the women who volunteered in the NPO started making blankets and then ventured into shopping bags to generate an income to support themselves. Currently, they employ 30 women, and the products made by Banna Blankets are sold at different stores at tourist hotspots, such as the Hello Africa marketplace, in Maboneng. Interestingly, the women working for the NPO have another business on the side, making and selling the same products under the supervision of their team leader.

Siyondla Umphakathi is an NPO consisting of 32 women assisting children and grandmothers in Alexandra with food parcels. The grandmothers then started a sewing initiative, sewing pillowcases, bed covers, traditional dolls, winter hats, and scarves. Currently, their market consists of local people, especially the elderly.

Umquele weAfrika is a non-profit company that outsources traditional dolls from a group of women in Alexandra to empower marginalised women economically. The dolls are sold at an online craft store called Lemonade, and the famous Johannesburg tourist craft market in Rosebank. The women who are part of the government initiative, Women in Tourism in

Alexandra, sell their craft products at various outlets, including the Alex Mall market, the Alex Heritage Museum stalls, and the Alexandra Art Market. These three areas are the main attractions in the township, providing the women crafters with an opportunity to sell their crafts to tourists. The women produce various souvenirs for tourists, such as beadwork, photo frames, diary covers, blankets, backpacks, laptop bags, traditional dolls, African attire, and shopping bags, which are reflected in their responses about their products.

### ***Business challenges of women souvenirs makers in Alexandra***

The triangulation of the results identified several challenges which hinder the women's success in souvenir-making opportunities in Alexandra. These challenges include (a) lack of access to funding due to bureaucracy, (b) crime and corruption, (c) mass production of souvenirs, (d) limited participation of women in tourism, and (e) lack of basic infrastructure to facilitate souvenir-making. These correspond with challenges identified in the literature by Ligthelm (2011), Maphalla et al. (2009), and Mboniyane and Ladzani, (2011). Each identified challenge is discussed in more detail below.

#### *Lack of access to funding as a result of bureaucracy*

The women entrepreneurs argued that they were aware of the government's funding opportunities, but the majority did not acquire funds due to nepotism and politics and the fact that the process was too long and challenging. In addition, many applicants were not eligible for government funding as they were not compliant in terms of Tax clearance certificates and individual bank accounts.

The problem is we have to comply; you find that you have everything, but you don't have SARS [South African Revenue Service] tax clearance; [or] you have a tax clearance, but you don't have a bank account... It is difficult to get funds, especially when you do not comply. (Focus group 3, participant 4, age 43).

Some participants revealed that they could not get a bank account as they were blacklisted due to outstanding debt, which hindered their capability of fulfilling government funding requirements. Lack of access to funding due to bureaucracy and lack of access to such opportunities is supported by the literature as the biggest stumbling block for women in growing their businesses (Akhawaya & Havenga, 2012; Makhitha, 2017).

#### *Crime and corruption*

Alexandra township is seen as dangerous due to criminal activities, especially violence, drug dealing and violent protests (Leonard & Dladla; 2020; Mbanjwa, 2018). Women also singled out high levels of crime and government corruption as major challenges for their businesses. "...yes, it is a problem with crime in Alexandra..." (Focus group 3, Participant 2, Age 42). "I saw something [crime committed against tourists], I am still afraid of that incident... tourists were mugged here last year September " Focus group 3, participant 4, age 43). Due to the alarming rate of criminal activities, women who reside in Alexandra avoid selling their souvenirs in the area and opt for other tourist areas. "... when you are in places like Sandton and Rosebank [two of Johannesburg's most affluent suburbs] you can get more tourists; the crime in here [Alexandra] doesn't allow most tourists to come through (Personal interview 1, participant 1, age 35).

Corruption is another big problem in Alexandra. One of the respondents implicates a government official who collected all the documents from women crafters to obtain the funding on their behalf. The women never received the funding nor heard from the official again.

...she [a minister] would tell you not to do it on your own because she has connections. That is the thing that killed my spirit... she took everything that was mine, she asked for SARS [Tax clearance certificate], everything... whether she got the funding under our name or what, I don't know ...(Focus group 3, participant 4, age 43).

Leonard and Dladla's (2020) study identified crime as the main obstacle to successful township tourism in Alexandra. The concerns regarding high levels of crime are not unique to Alexandra and prevail in other high-risk areas in Johannesburg (Malovha & Adinolfi, 2018; Moagi et al., 2021). The results of the study clearly confirm that the corrupt practices and bureaucracy are the main obstacle to expanding the souvenir-making businesses in Alexandra.

#### *Mass production of souvenirs*

Most participants identified Chinese souvenirs as major competition. The Chinese mass-produced crafts are almost identical to traditional African crafts, especially the beadwork, and are much cheaper and quicker to produce:

You just buy Chinese and go sell, but when you look at them, even these beads, they have been compromised. The Chinese and the Indians are killing our arts and craft. My biggest challenge is Chinese because the Chinese they forge our stuff ... (Focus group 3, Participant 2, Age 42).

The problem of local Chinese souvenirs is not uniquely Alexandra's problem. It has been recognised in other studies in preventing marginalised women from making a living with their traditional crafts skills (Adinolfi et al., 2018; Grobar, 2019; Makhitha, 2017).

#### *Limited participation of women in tourism*

The participation of women in tourism in Alexandra is often hindered by external forces as tour guides may purposively not direct tourists to the local craft market. On some occasions, tour guides would personally make a call to selected women to sell their souvenirs to the tourists excluding others:

...it turns not to be busy [at Alex Heritage Museum], so it will really depend on when you have tourists... cause sometimes the tour guides also control the whole thing... They control the route, whether to go to the market and all the activities that will be going on tour... (Personal interview 1, participant 1, age 35).

#### *Lack of basic infrastructure*

Lack of proper infrastructure, especially lack of electricity and adequate machinery, was cited as the greatest challenge in producing souvenirs.

The small machines, they stress us, when you have to make 500 [pieces] with a domestic machine it is like the microwave in the house; you cannot spin it a lot, it gets tired; the machine overheats, it locks, and stops operating... When we have electricity challenge, if it goes off, there is nothing we can do, we cannot deliver, we cannot sew... (Focus group 1, Participant 7, Age 31).

The participants also pointed out an inability to access a means to travel to souvenir markets situated outside of Alexandra.

...I also get invites to go to Soweto, but my problem is we are still new, and we do not have money, for instance for transport [43,2 km/26.84 miles]... transportation is a problem for us..." (Focus group 3, Participant 2, Age 42).

The respondents have mentioned that not having reliable transport prevents them from reaching the markets resulting in missed opportunities to make an income. Transportation problems make it difficult to reach craft markets in areas outside Alexandra where touristic activities occur, often at higher volumes, thus further reducing their access to the tourist market.

### ***Conclusion and recommendations***

This study examined the entrepreneurial challenges of marginalised women in the Alexandra township engaged in souvenir-making for the tourist market. The findings of the study have shown that it can become an indispensable tool in improving the quality of life of marginalised women in Alexandra, thus contributing to their empowerment. Women in South Africa experience various social challenges, such as poverty and high unemployment rates, with 33.9% being the breadwinners responsible for the survival of their families. Therefore, their souvenir businesses are necessity-based, as they use their home-based traditional skills to make an income, provide for their children, and support their families.

However, venturing into entrepreneurship and starting a small business in the township is not a simple task. The findings of the study identified the main challenges marginalised women in Alexandra face as souvenir-making entrepreneurs, which include: (a) lack of access to funding due to bureaucracy, (b) high levels of crime and government corruption, (c) mass production of souvenirs by the Chinese craft industry, (d) limited participation in tourism obstructed by tour guides, and (e) lack of basic infrastructure, electricity, and machinery, to facilitate continuous souvenir-making.

Lack of funding schemes and the complicated application process emerged as the main barrier to the empowerment of marginalised women involved in craft entrepreneurship in Alexandra. The application process and forms are not structured and developed in a language the applicant can understand, such as isiZulu and Sotho as the dominant languages in the township. In addition, the response time on the outcome of the funding applications is perceived as too long and thus uninviting. In addressing the financial challenges, the local government in Alexandra should set up a separate funding scheme specifically for marginalised women involved in craft entrepreneurship.

The results of the study also revealed that women souvenir makers do not have equal access to tourism opportunities because of tour guides' preferential treatment given to some women. Thus, tourism companies in Alexandra, such as Khavo Travel & Tours (specialised in tours for business tourists) and the Maboneng Township Arts Experience (providing arts and crafts tours around Alexandra) can create partnerships with women making souvenirs and officially include them in their tours. The National Department of Tourism can also step in and develop craft events and festivals celebrating local arts and crafts, thus increasing tourism interest into the township.

Furthermore, the private sector and government should collaborate to support the local communities by providing adequate infrastructure (electricity, working space) and security creating a conducive and safe environment for women to sell their arts and crafts to tourists. It is suggested that similar studies should be conducted in other townships to ascertain if the findings of this study reflect challenges of women entrepreneurs involved in souvenir-making in other townships. Notwithstanding the challenges identified by this study, a current concern is the impact and longer-term consequences that COVID-19 has had on the livelihoods of

marginalised women in townships, given the pandemic's devastating effect on the tourism sector in South Africa.

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