

Challenges and Coping Strategies of Covid-2019 in the Tourism Industry in Mauritius

Bibi Zaheenah Chummun*

Graduate School of Business and Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville

Campus, Durban, South Africa, Email: chummunb@ukzn.ac.za

Mpho Mathithibane

Graduate School of Business and Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville

Campus, Durban, South Africa, Email, mphomathithibane@gmail.com

**Corresponding Author*

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Abstract

The tourism industry of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) where Mauritius is one of them has been heavily impacted by 2019-nCoV due to its high reliance on foreign tourism. The study seeks to measure the effect of 2019-nCoV on the Mauritian tourism industry as well as its coping mechanism. The study methodology employs secondary data which has been sourced from academic journal publications, literature, documents from the Ministry of Tourism, government papers and other research readings. Secondary data was analysed through literature reviews and findings among others reveal negative impacts on economic activity and employment as a good percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comes from the Mauritian tourism industry. However, the small island of Mauritius has not given up in its struggle towards recovering its tourism industry to a certain extent. Although the small island has been declared a free zone of 2019-nCoV by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the increase in the number of cases from other countries is likely to have a strong bearing on the tourism industry of Mauritius. It is imperative that the island adopts a rigorous recovery approach in responding to the pandemic before the inflows and outflows of tourists occur again. It is recommended that taking proactive measures through planning the strict health-related safety measures and guidelines, green-focused tourism interventions amongst others and implementation thereof, should be undertaken by both the employees in the hospitality sector and the visiting tourists while the small island awaits for the upliftment of quarantine restrictions.

Keywords: 2019-nCoV, tourism, challenges, coping mechanism

Introduction

In January 2020, a global health pandemic known as Corona Virus (2019-nCoV) began in China and migrated at a fast pace to other countries worldwide in subsequent months including the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The pandemic kickstarted as a global crisis and had the potential to affect many human activities, including the tourism sector of SIDS which is currently heavily impacted (Dinarto, Wanto & Sebastian, 2020). There are 38 United Nation member SIDS in three regional subgroups: the Pacific, the Caribbean and Atlantic, Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Tourism is one of the most important sectors of SIDS. It forms part of many individual's livelihood strategies and generates most of the SIDS' GDP (UNWTO, 2020). Known as one of the quickest developing sectors, tourism has now become one of the

major economic activities for several SIDS such as Jamaica, Seychelles and Mauritius creating openings for jobs, income generation and foreign direct investments and earnings. Mauritius being a member of the SIDS relies highly on its tourism industry as a whole which is an essential component of the Mauritian economy contributing to 24% of its GDP (Worldometers, 2020).

The outbreak of the 2019-nCoV poses a major public health challenge in the small island of Mauritius and such type of pandemic of serious severity has never happened in many years (Stübinger & Schneider, 2020). Due to the rapid increase of infections and deaths for a small island impacting on the social and economic aspects of the country, a state of emergency was declared in March 2020 in Mauritius wherein a nationwide lockdown was imposed on 19 March 2020 to secure safety and prevent the spread of the virus. (UNWTO, 2020). The 2019-nCoV outbreak has already significantly affected the tourism industry through mass trip cancellations, closure of hotels, suspension of national and international flights, as well as events postponement (Fraccascia & Alvarado, 2020). However, in this ever-challenging times of 2019-nCoV, SIDS has been identified as the most vulnerable due to their heavy reliance on international tourism for sustainable economic development and growth. The unexpected upsurge of the pandemic is likely to have a prolonged downturn effect going forward in the short to medium run on the tourism and travel sectors (UNWTO, 2020). According to a recent study, the economic shocks on the tourism and travel sector could range from between thirty percent to as high as eighty percent reduction in income generated and could potentially last for the next two years until economies of SIDS recover (Coke-Hamilton, 2020).

Such a major shock has translated into a massive loss of jobs, a sharp decline in foreign exchange and tax revenues which curbs public spending capacity and ability to deploy the measures necessary to support livelihoods through the crisis. However, for a country that relies heavily on tourism, the government of Mauritius is under increasing pressure to reopen its airport to tourists and rescue an industry that employs almost a fifth of its workforce. The government has not lost hope or goodwill to regain some of its tourism industry. The question that arises is what the small island of Mauritius can do to recover its tourism industry based on a proactive damage loss strategy which accounts for 24% of its GDP. In light of this question, the paper focuses on the challenges posed by the pandemic in the short run in Mauritius. Since the prosperity of the island has already been compromised by the fall in tourism revenues, the study concludes with the coping mechanism due to these challenges posed by the pandemic. The main aim of this paper is to investigate the challenges and come up with coping strategies. To pursue this primary objective, the following secondary objectives have been followed:

- To review literature that relates to the impact of 2019-nCoV on the island of Mauritius,
- To identify those challenges which pertain to 2019-nCoV in the island of Mauritius,
- To recommend the coping mechanism to address those challenges which relate to 2019-nCoV on the Island of Mauritius.

Literature review

Impact of 2019-nCoV on the global tourism sector

In recent years, many studies have examined the economic and social impact of tourism which has received a lot of attention among researchers (Tichaawa, & Mhlanga, 2015; Wasudawan, & Ab-Rahim, 2017; Tichaawa, & Moyo, 2019). This is mainly because tourism is one of the fastest and largest sectors accounting for 10% of global GDP fueling economic growth and the development of informal and formal businesses (Ministry of Tourism, 2018). Specifically, tourism in SIDS has a strong income multipliers effect of generating economic activity and income in related tourism-oriented hospitality, recreational and transportation sectors

(Cannonier & Burke, 2018). Globally, the novel 2019-nCoV pandemic could see a reduction of over eight hundred million to 1.1 billion in international tourists (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). Signalling a loss to the tune of \$1.2 trillion related to receipts from tourism exports and an estimate of 120 million jobs in the travel and tourism area are at risk (Ekstein, 2020 Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020). Experience suggests that a \$1 million loss in international tourist revenue can lead to a fall in national income of \$2-3 million, mainly because of inter-sectoral linkages to hospitality and recreational activities in the economy and corresponding losses which lead to the large indirect losses when the tourism sector contracts (UNCTAD, 2020a). The direct and indirect impact of 2019-nCoV in Mauritius on the tourism industry is further explored in relation to healthcare, food security, the economy and employment.

Study area

The small island of Mauritius is located 1100 miles away from the south-east coast of the African continent in the Indian Ocean and has a population of 1.3 million. For many tourists, Mauritius has been classified as idyllic destinations. Classified as the 10th on the list of densely populated country, the blue lagoons, sandy beaches and the hospitality of the islanders are some luring features of the island and most of its tourists are mainly from European countries namely German, French and British. Tourism contributes to 24% of Mauritius GDP (UNCTAD, 2020b) and accounts for 19.1% of total employment in 2019. Mauritius is well poised to be the leading cruise tourist destination in the Indian Ocean region because of its strategic location, modern seaports, attractiveness and flexible air connectivity (Ministry of Tourism, 2018). The island has come out from a relatively low-income agriculture-based economy and tourism is classified as one of the fastest growing important sector (Stiglitz, 2011).

Challenges of 2019-nCoV on Mauritian healthcare

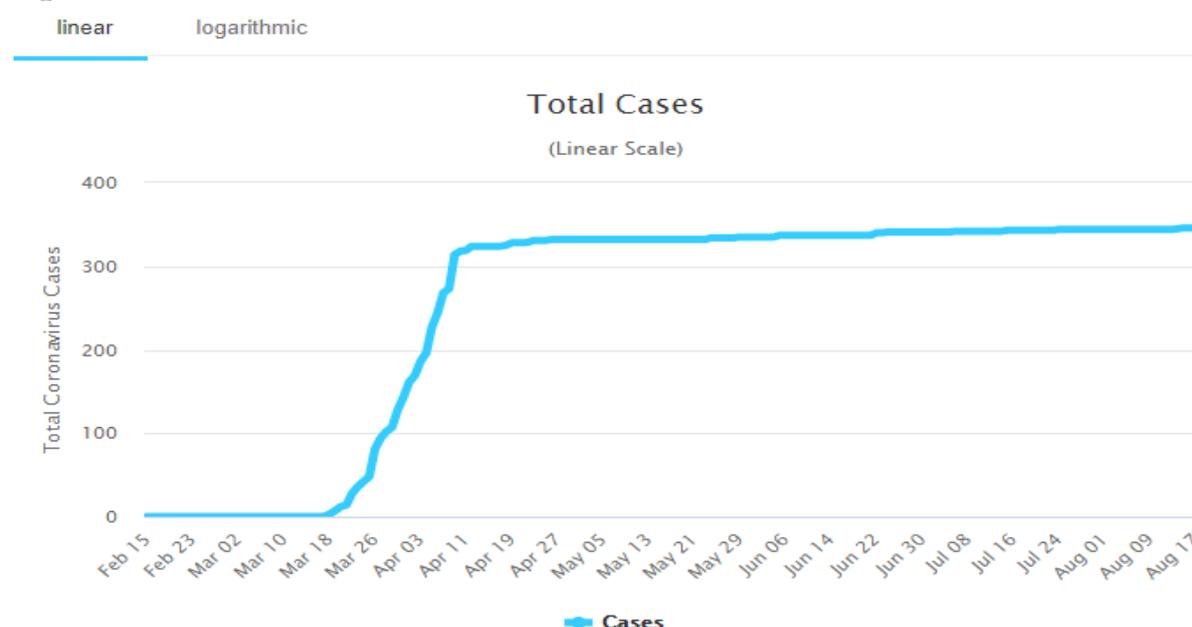
The 2019-nCoV pandemic has placed unprecedented pressure on many public health systems in Southern African countries. Despite virus containment and quarantine measures to curb the outbreak, the number of infections has continued to increase exponentially. However, with escalating infections, the 2019-nCoV recovery rate from the pandemic in Mauritius is seen as among the highest in the world at over 90% (Worldometers, 2020). The total number of 2019-nCoV cases registered in the small island of Mauritius has climbed up to 346 since March 2020 until August 2020 and ten people have passed away due to contracting the virus. Most of the deaths were recorded in the early stages of the pandemic. The figure 1 below illustrates the total number and escalation patterns of 2019-nCoV cases in 2020.

The recovery, control and stabilization of the outbreak is attributable to swift action by the authorities in implementing a nationwide lockdown, proactively increasing the provision and quality of healthcare through daily testing and screening for early detection, as well as making available quarantine centers for those infected. This confinement of sanitary curfew/lockdown, in addition to physical distancing, sanitization, sensitization awareness initiatives and safe shopping protocols have helped reduce the 2019-nCoV infection rate in Mauritius (Khan, Soobhug & Khan, 2020). Legislation such as the Miscellaneous Provisions Covid-19 Act 2020 and a Quarantine Act 2020 were introduced in May 2020 at the national assembly to accommodate the concerns of the pandemic. Both acts ensure strict sanitary measures that have been enforced in all public spots and venues.

Moreover, Mauritius is better equipped to respond to the crises in comparison to the rest of the countries in Southern Africa. The country has the highest number of doctors per 10 000 population, at 20, exceeding the recommendation threshold of 10 doctors per 10 000 people. The reaction from government has been commendable and exemplary, with over 71 percent of Mauritian households who have been able to obtain medical treatment when required

(Statistics Mauritius, 2020). However, an increased threat from unavailability of nutritious food and food security systems due to loss of income, limited agricultural activity and imposed restrictions on imports because of closed ports of entry is shaping to be a future social challenge for the country, including its tourism sector. The imposition of safety healthcare measures such as physical distancing and sanitary curfews in addition to reduction in the quality of food available is expected to have negative effects on the tourist's overall experience and consequent reduction on the number of potential and future-visiting tourists. From an indirect perspective, the lack of adequate tourism numbers can reduce the available resources for healthcare and improved human capital (Cannonier & Burke, 2018).

Figure 1: Total number of infected 2019-nCoV cases in 2020



Source: Worldodometers, 2020

Challenges of 2019-nCoV on Mauritian food security systems

The impact of the 2019-nCoV pandemic on SIDS has disrupted supply chains and international trade, resulting in pressure on nutrition and food security systems. Nearly all SIDS import 60 percent of their food mainly because due to limited landmass and restricted arable land on these islands. Therefore domestic food supplies are heavily restricted because of reliance on food imports, a situation of particular concern since the distance from global markets and restricted trade is likely to increase malnutrition rates of diet-related non-communicable disease such diabetes and asthma (FAO, 2020). Individuals with non-communicable diseases are a higher risk of contracting severe life-threatening symptoms of 2019-nCoV (PAHO, 2020). As such, the long-term effects are increases in poverty for the vulnerable populations and increased threat of ill-health and loss of life. Since the lockdown, approximately 17 percent of Mauritian households have skipped a meal (Statistics Mauritius, 2020). Since tourism is mainly centered on leisure, a proliferation of social challenges is expected to have negative effects. The crisis also ranges beyond food security but other productive sectors in the economy such as manufacturing were over 60% of international firms operating in Mauritius indicated having shortages in supplies of goods and raw materials from both national and international suppliers (ECA & IEC, 2020). This is likely to see major disruptions in economic activity.

Challenges of 2019-nCoV on the Mauritian economy

Mauritius is currently facing its worst economic downturn (Seegolam, 2020), along with the rest of Southern Africa. 2019-nCoV is expected to cost the region between \$37 billion and \$79 billion in output losses for 2020 due to a combination of effects though among others reduced foreign direct investment, capital flight; and direct impacts on health systems, and containment measures of the public response (World Bank, 2015). The national lockdown in Mauritius has reduced economic activity substantially, bringing economic implications and altered economic relationships. On average Mauritian companies are operating at 50% of their normal capacity in light of the 2019-nCoV crisis, with revenues expected to contract by 31-40% in 2020 and service-orientated companies are the most affected with anticipated declines of 41-50% (ECA & IEC, 2020). The tourism sector is at a complete halt and income from turnover has been reported as zero in July 2020. The closure of malls, restaurants, informal trade, hotels, tourist attractions, and grounding of airlines is expected to contract GDP by over 4%, with economic effects estimated to the tune of US \$25-33 million per day (Development Reimagined, 2020). Other estimates show that GDP could contract by up to 15%, resulting in loss of employment and reductions in government revenues from taxes, including foreign exchange earnings. Foreign exchange losses from the tourism sector alone have been estimated at around 12 billion Mauritian Rupees for April and May 2020 (Seegolam, 2020). Prior to the Corona Virus pandemic, the Mauritian local currency along with the rest of Southern Africa was already on a negative trajectory owing to sluggish economic growth, and double deficits in fiscal and current accounts. The health pandemic has worsened the trend as emerging market currencies come under mounting pressure from investors preferring the liquidity of the US dollar in times of uncertainty (UNECA, 2020).

The depreciation of the local Mauritian currency against the US Dollar and EURO (MCB, 2020) is anticipated to result in accelerated inflationary price increases for imported goods, including personal protective equipment, medication and medical equipment. The continued weakening of the local currency will consequently see increases in foreign-denominated currency debt obligations, resulting in more expensive debt repayment. Mauritius being a small, resource-constrained island has limited immediately alternative foreign exchange revenue-generating capacity to cater for external debt, to buy food, medications and other necessities and also to pay for tourism imports (Coke-Hamilton, 2020). The following table illustrates the tourism, debt and foreign currency reserve indicators.

Table 1: Tourism, debt and foreign currency reserve indicators

COUNTRY	Tourism % GDP	External debt % GDP	Reserves number of months for imports	Estimate fall in GDP	Financial assistance needed (million USD)
Mauritius	24	72	5	4% - 6%	540

Source: (UNCTAD, 2020b)

Mauritius has got a high external debt of 72% and only got reserves for 5 months (imports), therefore financial assistance is needed urgently figuring at USD540 Million. Travel and tourism worldwide due to 2019-nCoV are having a heavy effect on the tourism niche in Mauritius, which was already experiencing sluggish growth in 2019 (AHRIM, 2019). This is mainly due to a reduction in the count of international tourists from the European markets who were affected by the Euro crisis zone and effect from direct competitors such as Maldives, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. According to a study conducted by AHRIM recently, the international tourists visiting the island in 2019 has reduced by 1.1% and tourism imports income has declined by 1.5%. Further in the first few months before the pandemic reached Mauritius in 2020, there was a decline in the number of tourists' arrival by 33.9% in the first

quarter of the year 2020. Reduction in tourism activity is expected to have a negative spillover effect on employment, notably women and young people are more likely to be at risk. The downturn is expected to continue until the health crisis is over (FAO, 2020). Meaning that the net loss to the economy due to unemployed labour and capital is expected to continue (UNCTAD, 2020a).

Challenges of 2019-nCoV on Mauritian employment

The tourism industry is labour-intensive in nature and approximately 54 per cent of all roles within the sector are occupied by women and youth employees meaning that the industry is seen as highly inclusive (UNCTAD, 2020a). With the 2019-nCoV health and economic crisis across the globe, the Mauritian economy has not been spared. Unemployment figures have started to increase substantially, as of May 2020 the number of employed persons increased by almost 129,400 units, which represents about 24 percent (Statistics Mauritius, 2020). This is far cry from the expected 12,208 new employment opportunities that were expected in the tourism sector prior to the pandemic. According to the minister of finance, Mauritius could see unemployment levels rise by up to 150% (CNBCAfrica, 2020) as globally the spread of 2019-nCoV shows no sign of abating, meaning that the tourism industry will remain among the most affected. Facing the high rate of unemployment already in the small island across all sectors, the job market does not look promising in the short run. There is a possibility of a wage-cut in order to adjust to a certain extent the economic impact resulting from the pandemic outbreak. Prices in general imposed on goods and services in Mauritius have seen an increase due to import restrictions and depreciation of the Mauritian Rupees in recent months (Seegolam, 2020). The quality of life and jobs opportunities may also come down if the government responds to the pandemic effects by laying-off workers and changing their work contractual agreements through replacing full-time employees by part-time and/or temporary ones. This can have a negative impact as their medical aid, provident or pension contributions and other benefits which accrue to permanent employees could decline accordingly (UNECA, 2020).

Government intervention

The government has put in place fiscal stimulus measures in response to the pandemic in the form of increased financial support to businesses, wage incentives schemes and social welfare. In addition to stimulus packages, fiscal interventions to encourage social distancing initiatives have been introduced through a reduction in taxes with regard to wages and salaries of employees who work online from their respective home. Furthermore, a five percent tax credit relating to expenses on information and communication system, zero percent rate rather than fifteen percent rate for value-added tax on some specialised medical supplies were allocated (KPMG, 2020).

Central banks in the Southern African region have responded to the 2019-nCoV pandemic by easing monetary policies and bank liquidity rules to mitigate the macroeconomic impact (UNECA, 2020). The central Bank of Mauritius has provided an amount of around 60 billion Mauritian Rupees to the State for economic stabilization purposes. Commercial banks have been instructed to suspend capital repayments on loans for affected businesses and supervisory guidelines on handling credit impairments have been eased. The Mauritius Investment Corporation is also being set-up to rebuild and accelerate economic development as well as establish a value base for the current and future generations by supporting innovative driven initiatives, and assisting large and medium-sized viable commercial entities to fully recover from the shocks of the pandemic (Seegolam, 2020). Generally, Mauritian firms seem

relatively satisfied with the responses offered by the government to the global pandemic (ECA & IEC, 2020).

Research methodology

The paper adopted a secondary research methodological approach, and thus the researcher has followed the required steps to perform and analyse secondary data. The data was collected from six articles. The research has developed a research question being the first step on which the paper will be developed. Here based on the above, the main question relates to what can the government of Mauritius do to recover its tourism industry which accounts for 24% of its GDP and employs a fifth of its workforce. The identification of the secondary set of data is the second step of the methodology followed by the third step which is to evaluate the data set. Finally, the fourth set of data relates to the conclusion of the data set being evaluated. The search of the literature was done through the assistance of keywords, defining the key concepts, choosing the databases platforms, making an evaluation of the results and selecting the most relevant literature pieces to conduct the study. The secondary data was evaluated and concluded using the intensive literature reviews culminating from journal articles, government reports, tourism association reports, web pages and textbooks as per Table 2 below.

Table 2: Literature analysis and operationalization

Article/paper	Observations	Sources
Tourism sector in Mauritius devastated by COVID-19	Tourism industry in Mauritius highly dominates the small island of Mauritius. The pandemic is having a huge impact on Mauritius has also led to high unemployment rates not only in tourism industry but in other industries such as textile and manufacturing sectors too on which the island relies heavily. The travel and tourism sector has been the most affected as it employs 20 percent of its whole workforce Furthermore 10 deaths and 346 cases have been recorded. The infected covid-19 cases have been diagnosed with severe lung infections such as pneumonia and related diseases.	CNBCAfrica(2020)
COVID-19 (Coronavirus) drives Sub-Saharan Africa toward first recession	The people from Sub-Saharan African countries have been adversely affected by the high economic costs due the pandemic and were required to follow universal social distancing policies	World Bank (2020)
Tourism in Small Island Developing States(SIDS): Building a more sustainable future for the people of Islands	As much as the tourism for SIDS fosters growth and development, it also faces many challenges such as their remoteness affects their ability to be part of the global supply chain, increases import costs and limits taxes revenues, foreign exchange reserves in the tourism industry. Resultantly this reduces public spending capacity and curbs measures to support livelihoods. Many are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change from devastating storms to the threat of sea level rise	United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2020)
Reinventing the Mauritian economic model amid the Covid-19 pandemic	The country, heavily exposed to global dynamics, now faces serious challenges of declining tourism as the borders are closed for travel inbound and outbound, capital flight from its financial sector and increasing concerns about food security and more importantly in the immediate run, health issues. The infected people contracted severe pneumonia and some even died of it. The WHO declared Mauritius as a high-risk zone country. A rethink is needed of how to adapt, especially with a downturn in the global economy due to Covid-19	Gopaldas (2020)
Variations in Government responses to Covid-19	The government of Mauritius responded early to the COVID-19 pandemic with stringent early lockdown measures. Since March 2020 the cases have been increasing until August 2020 until stabilized. The	Hale, T, N Angrist, B Kira, A Petherick, T Philips and S Webster (2020)



	Republic of Mauritius has been assigned the highest score on the Stringency Index by researchers from Oxford, who are tracking the interventions of different governments	
Mauritius takes a responsible approach towards COVID-19	In the early days of Covid-19, to provide relief to the most deprived of our citizens, a COVID-19 Solidarity Fund has been established but it is not enough to cater for everyone that has been affected in the island and the road to recovery is still long	De Comarmond (2020)

Results and discussion

The findings reveal that the tourism sector of Mauritius has been significantly affected due to the unexpected rise of 2019-nCoV. There have been 346 cases of infected people and they have suffered from severe pneumonia and lungs-related infections of which 10 infected people have passed away between 22 March 2020 and 27 April 2020 (Worldometers, 2020). Therefore, the island has closed its borders and restricted entry to the country for tourists to prevent further spread of the virus in March 2020. These containment measures have been highly successful with the level of active cases reducing to as low as 11 at the end of August 2020 (Worldometers, 2020).

The findings also show that the pandemic has also affected the small economy tourism sector which employs a fifth of the working population as it has experienced a massive loss of employment in its tourism sector and the loss of a further job is anticipated due to 2019-nCoV. Further losses in terms of tourism income, mainly foreign currency earnings have placed a strain on the national outlook. The local currency along with that of emerging markets has depreciated against other main world currencies placing inflationary pressure on local goods. Other sectors such as manufacturing and textile have also been affected and led to the slow-down of the economy. Healthcare resources have been stretched due to the provision of extra and unbudgeted for medication and treatment, as well as daily screening and costs to quarantine infected persons. Food security systems have been compromised due to restrictions on import and limited agricultural activity on the small island (Gopaldas, 2020). All of these factors have direct and indirect negative impacts on the availability of resources for infrastructure and capital spend to further develop the island to attract more tourists and offer a better leisure experience. The uncertainty in future planning caused by 2019-nCoV on tourists will not only affect national government infrastructure programmes but it is also expected to encourage capital flights to safe havens and reduce foreign direct investment (MCB, 2020).

Approximately, one million tourists visit the country every year. Inviting the international tourists to visit the island again has been felt uncertain by many stakeholders such as lobby groups, community and health-based organisations due to borders restrictions and the possibilities of the recurring pandemic infection as a second wave. Many tourists have postponed their visit to the island as a measure of safety and some of the small hotels and restaurants in Mauritius have been closed. Some tourists who were stranded on the island have been put into quarantine in some hotels at a high economic cost to the government. To cushion the impact of the virus on the livelihood of citizens and business, the Mauritian government has adopted a responsible and proactive approach which entails the establishment of a solidarity fund to provide financial support and financing for future projects and schemes related to 2019-nCoV (Government of Mauritius, 2020). Moreover, Mauritius like other SIDS is very eager to reopen its borders to welcome international tourists so that the tourism industry can start operating and generating income. Coupled with a ban on travel and health-related fears and challenges, the striking question is what can the island do to protect its people jobs at risk and recover its tourism industry when its borders open. The following recommendations are provided in the next section of the article.

Containment policies

Even though Mauritius is now declared a virus-free region after all the positive cases have recovered. The people in Mauritius are fearful about a second wave of the virus should the economy restart to welcome international tourists when borders open. A wise way to liaise with it will be to start planning much in advance while waiting for the upliftment of borders restrictions and keeping the country on high alert. One of the prominent measures is to plan the containment policies and implement them thereof, such as observing self-isolation, observing a 2-metres physical distancing, self-quarantine, contactless payment transactions, proper ventilation, sanitizers and wearing masks. This is supported by Flaxman (2020) who provide a useful categorisation of containment policies such as non-pharmacological measures and interventions such as social distancing observed, case-based self-isolation and quarantine mandated, closure of schools, lockdown observed and closure of public events. According to Baldwin (2020), increasing testing capacities should be made a priority as this could assist the activities to be started swiftly with little fear of contamination from employees at work. The tourists should also be screened at the airport that they are free from the virus. Both employees and tourists should be tested and screened. Individuals displaying symptoms quarantined for the prescribed minimum time as guided by health authorities. Since tourism is about hospitality, testing negative and feeling psychologically immune from the virus is more likely to allow the employees to offer the best service to the tourists who will feel also safe when visiting the country and ultimately to prevent further spread of the pandemic. Further, improved measures of hygiene have to be proactively put in place in all hotels through clear protocol and local sanitary regulations. Availability of a medical practitioner on a 24-hour service, continuous health screening of the employees once a week through health-related questionnaire, duly filled in and monitored should also be part of the well-defined procedures at the resort and airport which strictly comply with World Health Organisation recommendations (UNWTO, 2020) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) recommendations. Continued education around on the spread of 2019-nCoV is to become the new norm. A coordinated approach by the government and private sector is required to ensure continued provision of sanitizers in public places and awareness-raising campaigns promoting the regular washing of hands should be maintained. Thus far, interventions by the state have been commendable in containing the virus. It is expected that in future tourists will select their travel destination based on safety protocols in that region and well as suppressed rates of infection. Therefore, the challenge for the Ministry of Tourism is to eliminate the opportunities for virus transmission and ensure that tourists still have a positive travel experience. This will boost the overall attractiveness of Mauritius as a safe holiday destination.

Stimulus measures

The labour-intensive sector of travel and tourism is one of the most affected areas in Mauritius employing 20% of its whole workforce. The island has encountered severe job losses due to 20 across its value chain. Going forward, it is prominent to protect these employees and ensure jobs retention for these tourist workers and prevent any further jobs losses. Since, it is a well-known fact that SIDS have received some relief grants and funding from international organizations such as World Bank among others (World Bank, 2020; UNWTO, 2020), Mauritius should make use of those economic assistance. This can be done through enhancing the wage assistance scheme, relief funds in an attempt to protect these jobs at risk in the tourism sector. Such relief funds should flow in a transparent, convenient and accessible manner for citizens. Further, in Mauritius there are many hotels which are built on state land then leased out to the hotel owners and the government has mentioned that those leases will be waived for

the next two years (Mauritius Travel and Tourism Association, 2020). However, it will be better that as long as the travel and tourism sector has not mostly recovered, the lease must still be valid for these hotels. Other incentives should also be considered to be implemented when its borders open such as upliftment of the environmental tax of each and every tourist who is required to pay on a daily basis for staying on the resort. Giving out vouchers, facilities of payments to support the national airline and travel agencies, tour operators who play a central role in many a tourist's experiences, among others should also be taken into account while planning the recovery approach related to the forthcoming of the tourists to the island.

Green tourism

Green tourism in recent years has been an important element for tourists to consider when choosing a holiday destination due to mainly environmental issues and change in consumer preferences (Ruhanen, Weiler, Moyle, McLennan, 2015). Green tourism relates to any tourism measure or activity being undertaken in an ecologically and environmentally friendly manner (Sung-kwon, Jae-hyun and Seong-il, 2003). Although Mauritius has got many green spots such as the Pamplemousses historical garden, golf spots, Black River Gorge among others, going forward to lure international guests to the island it can enhance its range of green tourism sites and processes for forthcoming tourists. Going green through most of its processes can increase its number of tourists and bring competitive advantage when opting for a holiday. On the other side, this will attract employees and retain them because of the luring green aspect that can make them feel secure in an era of 2019-nCoV. Since the trend is towards exploring the open spaces, forests and nature exploration when borders open, the aspect of green tourism across most processes and sites should be embedded in the marketing approach by tour operators, travel agencies and the national airline. The eco-tourism activities are more likely to enable tourists to discover the island from a different angle (Prayag, 2011). This is more likely to enhance responsible and more sustainable tourism in a post-pandemic world when borders open to welcome international tourists.

Conclusion

This article provides a snapshot of the state of affairs of the small island of Mauritius tourism sector in the wake of the pandemic since that not much academic research has been undertaken related to the effect of 2019-nCoV on the tourism sector of the island. The tourism sector has indeed been significantly affected due to the pandemic and many jobs losses among others have been encountered, including adverse effects on health and food security. At present, the Mauritian people and tourists who intend visiting the island should pay for their own quarantine for a two-week period. Only if they have been cleared up from the virus tests during the fortnight, they will be able to go home or visit the country. This new rule tends to be costly and time consuming for some and can be quite a demotivating initiative. Further, the overall economic impact has been severe, namely, capital flights, loss of foreign earnings, depreciation of the local currency and inflationary pressure on food costs, in particular, not to mention rising national debt levels. All of this contributes to the significant economic downturn on the tourism-dependent small island. The objectives of the study have been addressed in this study and the findings tally with the literature identified and analysed. The researcher also provides recommendations through coping strategies with regard to the challenges that have been determined. The study is important to the policymakers, government, academics and the public as a whole in considering ways to respond to the pandemic in order to stimulate and revitalize the tourism sector in Mauritius. Going forward, the island still has some time before it fully reopens its borders and uplifts the quarantine restrictions, therefore, the planning approach for recovery of its tourists should be made a priority for the labour-intensive of travel and tourism

sector in the immediate run. It is expected that the effect of the pandemic will at least continue for some time, which is of rising concerns and uncertainty for the small island economy in Africa. However, there is still light at the end of the tunnel to improve the situation of its travel and tourism sector and the livelihoods of its citizens.

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