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Socio-economic and environmental impacts of COVID-19 on domestic tourism in South Africa: Challenges and opportunities to transition to a more sustainable and resilient sector

Dino Gounden



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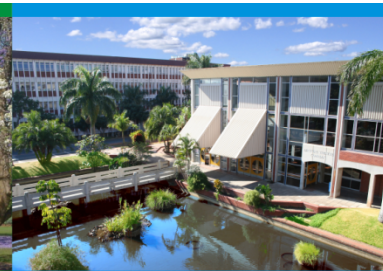
HOWARD COLLEGE CAMPUS



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UKZN INSPIRING GREATNESS

Context of research

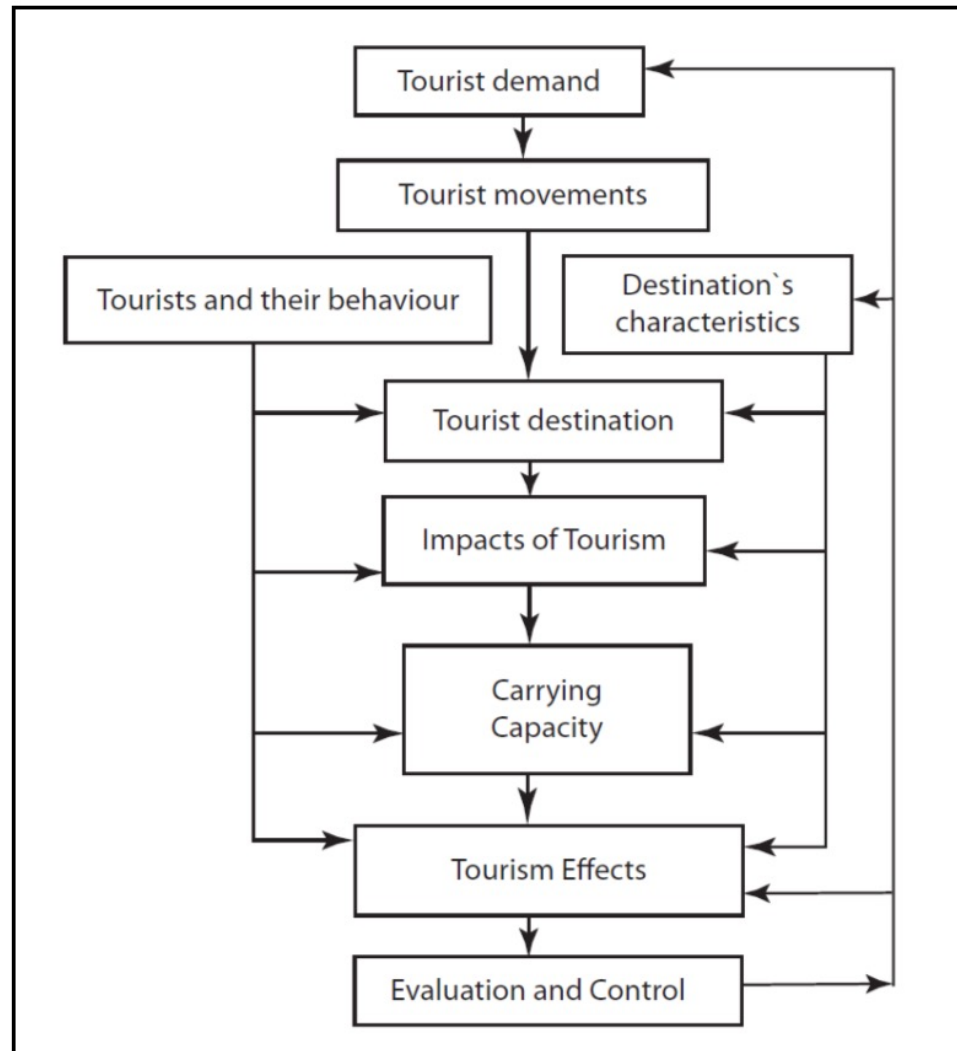
- Global importance socio-economic importance of tourism and increasing awareness of environmental issues
 - Reliance on natural resources – dominance of nature-based or related tourism in South Africa
 - Impacts of sector on the environment
- COVID-19 has had wide ranging and severe impacts on tourism trends worldwide, including South Africa
- Why focus on domestic tourism?
 - Tourism's recovery will depend on domestic tourism
 - Domestic tourism is expected to return quicker and sturdier than international tourism
 - A more sustainable form of tourism, especially given the consensus that change and disruption will be a persistent feature
- There is limited attention being paid to sustainability considerations as the sector recovers
 - Recovery at what costs?

Research objectives

- **Examine the socio-economic and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic tourism in South Africa.**
- **Assess changes among South African residents in relation to COVID-19 impacts and responses (including willingness to embrace sustainability practices and behavioral change) on domestic tourism.**
- **Critically assess the sustainability best practices and mechanisms that are emerging to rebuild domestic tourism in South Africa, including identifying challenges and how these can be addressed.**
- Assess, using a sustainability lens, pre-, during and post-COVID-19 South African domestic tourism travel patterns, preferences and behaviors.
- Examine the extent to which South African tourism service providers and the public sector (government departments) are ready to support and promote domestic tourism, giving due consideration to sustainability issues.
- Assess sustainability best practices and mechanisms that are emerging (drawing on international contexts as well) to rebuild domestic tourism in South Africa, including challenges experienced and how these should be addressed.
- To forward recommendations emanating from the research findings to inform strategies for a sustainable and resilient domestic tourism sector in South Africa.

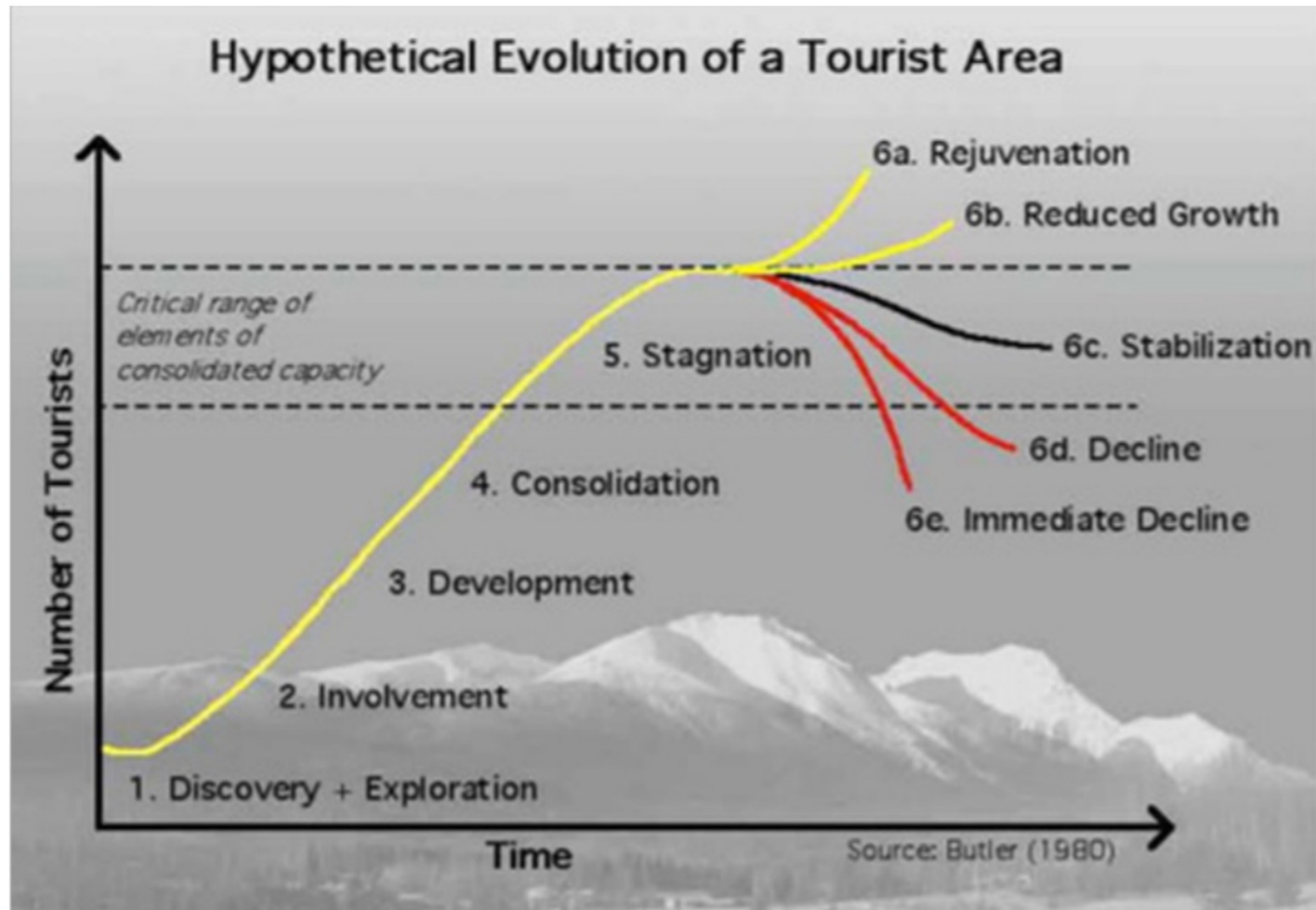
Multi-conceptual theoretical framework

- Conceptual framework for tourism (Wall and Mathieson, 2006)



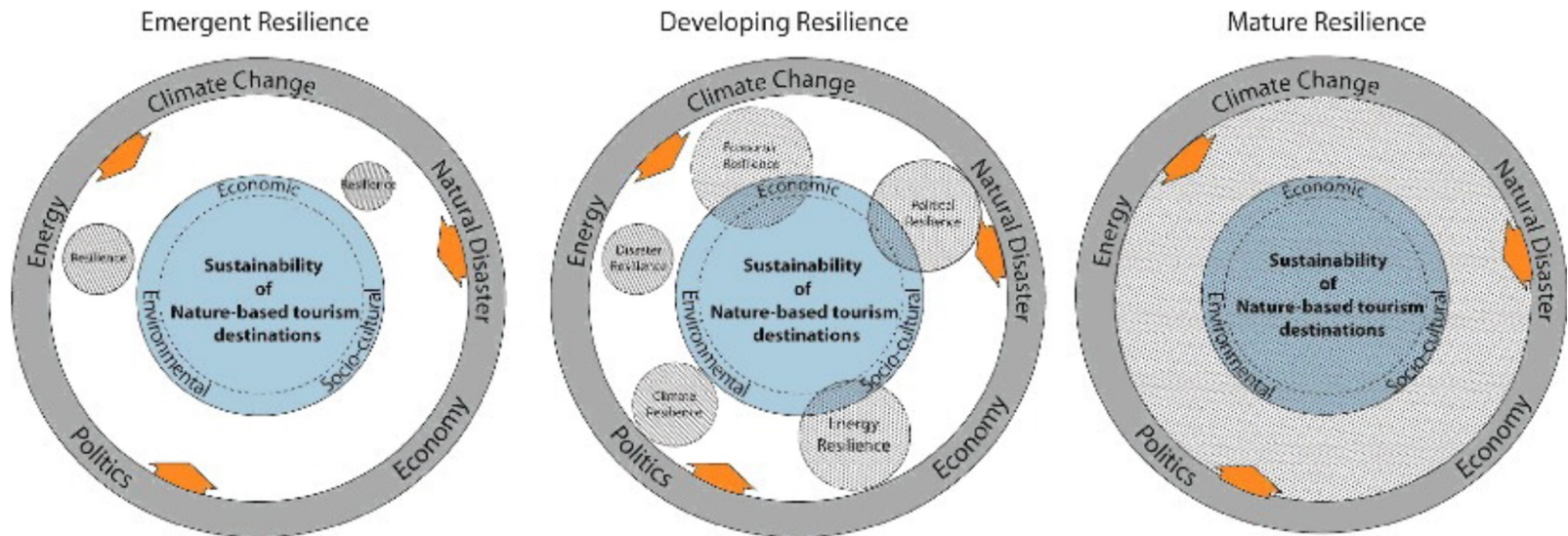
Conceptual theoretical framework cont.

- Evolution of a tourism area (Adillón, 2019: 12)



Conceptual theoretical framework cont.

- Conceptual relationship between resilience and sustainability in NBT destinations (Espiner et al., 2017)
- Importance of adopting a **value chain approach** to shift to sustainable practices eg. loadshedding



Research Design and Methodology

- Mixed methods research design
- Desktop study/ literature review
 - Domestic tourism and the COVID-19 pandemic context and trends
 - Domestic tourism responses to the pandemic
 - Challenges for reigniting domestic tourism
 - Innovative responses that are emerging
 - Recommendations that are evident
- Quantitative surveys
 - Online (limited response) and face-to-face surveys in purposively selected cities/ towns (Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Kimberly and St Lucia)
 - Tourism service provider surveys: 406 subjected to analysis
 - General public/ travel behavior surveys: 1 034 subjected to analysis
- Qualitative research

Selected results

- Profile of tourism service providers
 - Diverse and multiple activities involved in
 - Change in business/ organization's overall annual
 - All impacted by the pandemic (specifically during lockdowns)
 - Mostly from KwaZulu-Natal followed by Western Cape and Gauteng and urban or town-based
 - Most established – operating for more than 10 years
 - More businesses/ organizations had higher turnovers prior to the pandemic
- Profile of general public respondents
 - Population group: Black African followed by Indian/ Asian (25.8%), Colored (19.1%) and White (18.3%)
 - Mostly between the ages of 21 and 40 years
 - Majority were females (53.9%) and 43.9% were males
 - Majority had some level of post-schooling qualifications
 - Mostly employed from a variety of income groups
 - Mostly from Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape as a result of the purposive selection of cities for the face-to-face interviews
 - The COVID-19 pandemic personally affected the financial status of close to a third of the respondents
 - Most respondents travelled domestically travelled prior to the pandemic and have resumed travel (mainly for business purposes and visiting friends and relatives while prior to pandemic the main reason was holiday/ vacation)

Change in operations among tourism service providers

- Business/ organisational adjustments being used by tourism service providers
- How the pandemic is likely to change the operations of domestic tourism in the long-term/ after the COVID-19 pandemic has been brought under control (n=406) (Multiple responses)

	Frequency	Percent
No impact – will go back to business as usual	61	15.0
Have stricter controls to ensure adherence to improved health practices in terms of hygiene	303	74.6
Change the type of business in (different from tourism sector)	66	16.3
Use online/ virtual platforms more	142	35.0

Challenges faced by tourism service providers

- Challenges do tourism service providers face in the recovery of domestic tourism in South Africa (n=406) (Multiple responses)
- External in orientation

	Frequency	Percent
None/ no response	9	2.2
Do not have sufficient funding	338	83.3
Do not qualify for a loan or to extend current loan	168	41.4
Do not have the information to apply for funding/ seek relief	215	53.0
Do not have any or reliable internet access	184	45.3
Lack of marketing opportunities	268	66.0
Lack of consumer confidence	232	57.1
Lack of suitable business premises/ spaces outside the home	104	25.6
Do not have suitable alternative premises	118	29.1
The uncertainty of the pandemic	306	75.4
Safety and security concerns, especially in the context of recent social unrest	188	46.4

Re-positioning the domestic tourism sector: service provider responses

- Extent to which agree or disagree with statements regarding how South Africa's domestic tourism sector can be better positioned to deal with future disruptions (including climate change) to transition to a more resilient and sustainable sector (DK – Don't know, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral/ unsure/ don't know, 4 = agree and 5 – strongly agree) (n=406, in %)

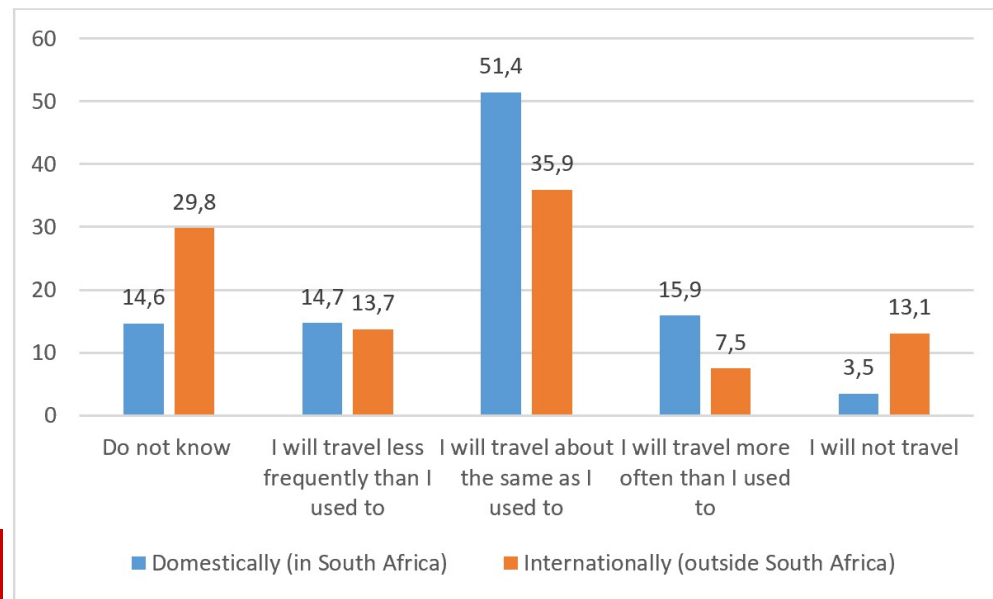
	DK	1	2	3	4	5
Diversify domestic tourism products	2.2	3.2	3.7	21.7	49.5	19.7
Use local labour	.5	2.2	3.2	8.1	56.7	29.3
Permit staff/ employees to work from home, where feasible/ practical	10.1	3.4	19.2	26.8	30.0	10.3
Use local service providers	1.0	2.0	1.2	5.7	60.1	30.0
Use of local products	1.7	2.2	1.5	4.4	58.1	32.0
Purchase green/ fair trade products	12.6	1.5	1.7	14.5	46.1	23.6
Conserving water in tourism establishments (for example, reuse of towels and use of greywater)	5.4	1.7	2.7	11.1	54.2	24.9
Conserving energy (for example, transitioning to renewable energy sources such as solar energy, use of energy conserving lights and appliances, etc.)	3.7	2.0	1.7	11.1	52.0	29.6
Proper disposal of waste (including recycling and composting)	4.9	1.7	1.0	11.3	54.2	26.8
Promoting green behavioural change/ information on environmentally-friendly behaviour	5.7	1.7	1.2	11.3	53.2	26.8
Having a tourism disaster management fund that can be more easily accessed	6.2	2.5	.7	6.2	42.6	41.9
Regular health screenings for employees and guests/ customers	4.4	2.0	8.1	13.8	41.6	30.0
Develop site/ organisational disaster management plans	13.8	2.5	1.2	11.3	42.1	29.1
Support/ contribute to carbon offsetting projects/ greening programmes	11.6	2.5	1.5	11.6	49.0	23.9

Travel behaviour: general public

- If personally had a domestic (in South Africa) trip affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (n=1034) (Multiple responses)

	Frequency	Percent
Not applicable/ no trips	265	25.6
Yes, trip cancelled	290	28.0
Yes, trip postponed	256	24.8
No, planned trip continued uninterrupted	297	28.7

- How intend to change domestic and international travel plans after the COVID-19 virus is under control (in a post-COVID-19 pandemic world) (n=1034, in %)



Types of tourism interested in: general public

- Types of domestic tourism activities attracted to participate in (n=1034) (Multiple responses)

	Frequency	Percent
No response	28	2.7
None/ not applicable	4	.4
Coastal and marine tourism (visiting beach areas)	655	63.3
Cultural and heritage tourism	277	26.8
Outdoors/ nature-based (game reserves, conservation areas, etc.) tourism	541	52.3
Events tourism (sports, concerts, etc.)	305	29.5
Business tourism (meetings, conferences, exhibitions, etc.)	198	19.1
Rural tourism	47	4.5
Township tourism	49	4.7
Medical, health and wellness tourism	38	3.7
Religious tourism	82	7.9
Cruise tourism	225	21.8
Visiting casinos	178	17.2
Social (including visiting friends and relatives)	755	73.0
Staycations (exploring destinations/ tourism sites where or close to where one is residing and/ or staying in accommodation establishments in city/ area where home is located)	346	33.5

Factors influencing travel: general public

- Extent to which specific factors will influence domestic travel choices/ decisions (n=1034)

	Not important	Slightly important	Very important	Do not know
Seek out value for money domestic tourism destination/ less costly	5.8	17.1	73.1	4.0
Choose a destination closer to my home/ place of residence	49.1	28.2	17.0	5.6
Choose destinations where information about the area, sites, activities and infrastructure are easily accessible on the internet	10.5	32.6	48.5	8.4
Choose destinations that have a diversity of tourism products and attractions	11.6	40.2	39.2	9.0
Choose destinations where fewer tourists visit	21.2	44.0	26.1	8.7
Choose outdoors/ nature-based activities	16.3	41.7	34.6	7.4
Choose destinations that offer smart technology and a contactless tourism experience	14.3	39.7	36.7	9.4
Avoid travelling during high seasons when there are more tourists	16.3	41.3	32.5	9.9
Avoid group travel with persons not part of family and friends (such as tours)	14.2	40.9	36.0	8.9
Avoid travel using public transport at destination	12.4	39.6	40.5	7.5
Check on host destination's ability to maintain health and safety protocols	6.5	29.7	56.3	7.5
Safe and secure destination (in terms of crime)	3.4	24.6	64.3	7.7
Check on the quality of the health care system at the host destination	6.5	37.6	48.2	7.7
Ensure that travel insurance covers pandemics or other forms of disruptions	6.6	39.1	45.5	8.9
Safe to travel/ low risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus	3.7	34.2	56.9	5.2
Choose destinations that are environmentally friendly/ embrace green practices	12.9	44.6	29.5	13.1

Re-positioning the domestic tourism sector: general public

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Permit staff/ employees to work from home, where feasible/ practical	7.4	8.1	7.4	15.3	37.4	24.4
Use local service providers	4.6	1.8	1.8	10.6	47.4	33.7
Use of local products	4.6	1.3	2.9	9.9	47.4	33.9
Purchase green/ fair trade products	8.3	.9	6.5	14.5	44.9	25.0
Conserving water in tourism establishments (for example, reuse of towels and use of greywater)	5.6	1.5	2.6	13.8	48.9	27.5
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Promoting green behavioural change/ information on environmentally-friendly behaviour	5.9	2.0	7.2	13.1	43.0	28.8
Regular health screenings for employees and guests/ customers	4.0	1.5	3.0	10.8	41.5	39.3
Support/ contribute to carbon offsetting projects/ greening programmes	10.1	1.2	7.1	12.5	43.3	25.9
Support Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives/ investments	13.2	1.7	6.6	14.1	41.5	22.8

Conclusion

- Domestic tourism's recovery needs to include adequate focus on resiliency and sustainability
- Establishing relevant support that will transition towards resilient and sustainable growth of the domestic tourism sector
- Urgent need to address disruptions and render the sector more resilient to future shocks

Thank You! Siyabonga!



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