STAKEHOLDER INTERACTION AND COHESION: ADVANCING INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN THE TOURIST GUIDING SUBSECTOR

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Abstract : Tourist guiding plays a critical role and is often regarded as a mechanism for social and economic upliftment due to its relatively low barriers to entry. However, transformation within the subsector has progressed slowly, particularly for women and youth. This study explores the nature of stakeholder interaction and cohesion in advancing the ongoing development and inclusive transformation of the tourist guiding subsector. The research employed in-depth interviews with provincial registrars of tourist guiding and representatives from various guiding associations, resulting in a total of 14 interviews. The findings underscore the importance of recognising and respecting the distinct roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. The study found that a lack of clarity and coordination among stakeholders led to inefficiencies in fulfilling their mandates and aligning with the broader strategic vision for transformation. Overall, the study emphasises the critical role of collaboration, both within and beyond the subsector, in ensuring its continued development amid historical and contemporary challenges. The study contributes practical and theoretical insights to guide inclusive and transformative development within the tourist guiding subsector.

Key words: tourist guides, transformation, inclusive development, stakeholder collaboration, South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Tourist guides have long been recognised as key frontline workers in the tourism sector, playing a crucial role in shaping memorable experiences that can be leveraged for sustained destination growth (Nyahunzvi and Njerekai, 2013; Kapa et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2023). Despite their diverse roles as interpreters, educators, cultural brokers, co-creators of experiences, and mediators between tourists, destinations, and tourism suppliers (Weiler and Black, 2015; Chen et al., 2018; Kapa et al., 2022), the value and importance of the tourist guiding subsector remain underacknowledged in tourism literature, industry practice, and government policy globally (Nyahunzvi and Njerekai, 2013; Hurombo et al., 2025). This renders a critical component of the tourism value chain vulnerable to the effects of crises, economic fluctuations, lack of formal recognition and regulation, and insufficient access to training and succession planning. The consequent domino effects can lead to diminished visitor experiences, weakened destination reputation, reduced economic benefits for local communities, and a decline in the overall tourism sector and destination itself (Fu et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2018; Kapa et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges is therefore central to advancing the inclusive development of the tourism sector, as empowering tourist guides contributes to greater equity, participation, and representation within the tourism workforce.

Certainly, inclusive development within the tourist guiding subsector remains a pressing concern, given the promises attached to the sector regarding job creation and the reduction of existing marginalisation within the tourism workforce (de Beer et al., 2014; SATSA, 2024; Shumba et al., 2024; Department of Tourism, 2023) as well as the greater need for transitioning away from the traditionally exclusive nature of the subsector (Trilaksono et al., 2025; Lekgau et al., 2025). Furthermore, in the South African context, the legacy of apartheid is still evident, particularly for individuals from previously disadvantaged groups (Lekgau et al., 2024; Abrahams, 2019), thus making transformation a major national policy imperative, with attention to tourism, as a labour-absorptive sector, being critical (Abrahams, 2019). Compounding these challenges, the tourist guiding subsector was one of the most adversely affected during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, with many guides exiting the subsector in search of alternative opportunities for self-support (Mbatha et al., 2021). This has raised concerns regarding the longer-term implications of the crisis, which include shortages of qualified guides, particularly evident during the sector's reopening, thereby significantly exacerbating the vulnerability of the guiding subsector (Kapa et al., 2023; Bama and Nyikana, 2021). More recently, uncertainty surrounding the qualification framework has further constrained the sector's stability. In 2022, it was announced that all existing qualifications accredited by the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) would expire. This followed the implementation of the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) Policy in 2021, which mandated that, by 30 June 2023, all previous skills programmes be discontinued and replaced with new occupational qualifications (Schultz, 2023). These issues have a significant impact on the continued growth and development of the subsector, particularly in consideration of previously disadvantaged population groups and their involvement.

Thus, in the pursuit of transforming the tourist guiding subsector, it is crucial that all stakeholders within the tourism sector and value chain work cohesively to ensure effective short-, medium-, and long-term planning that aligns with the inclusive developmental goals of the sector at large (Trilaksono et al., 2025). It is against this backdrop that the current study was conceptualised, recognising the importance of the tourist guiding subsector and its potential to provide a defined career path for previously disadvantaged individuals, while also acknowledging the historical legacy and contemporary issues that affect it, some of which remain unresolved. This study draws attention to the systemic issues underlying cohesion between key stakeholders in the subsector, encompassing both private and public arenas, which affect the continued development of the subsector towards its goals of inclusivity and transformation. Certainly, fostering synergy between the various stakeholders is essential for the development of the subsector, as although public sector stakeholders lead the direction of development, the private sector can leverage resources that are often scarce in the public sector context (Chiwawa and Wissink, 2023). Hence, leveraging synergy between stakeholders is a critical step towards the strategic inclusive development of the subsector, stemming from the concept of stakeholder cohesiveness (Bama and Nyikana, 2021). Thus, this paper is grounded in an examination of the importance of stakeholder cohesiveness for inclusive development in the tourist guiding subsector.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical Underpinnings: Stakeholder Theory and Inclusivity

To understand the significance of stakeholder cohesiveness for inclusive development in the tourist guiding subsector, it is paramount to identify the relevant stakeholders. The application of stakeholder theory in this context is particularly pertinent, given its relevance to tourism (Martini and Buffa, 2015). This theory offers a valuable framework to comprehend the nature, interactions, and outcomes of various stakeholders within the tourism sector (Xiao and Xu, 2025; Nyanjom et al., 2018), which can influence its inclusive growth. The theory posits the importance of identifying stakeholders and their interests and influence, with issues of power, urgency, and legitimacy underpinning their interactions (Khazaei et al., 2015). Nyanjom et al. (2018) emphasise the importance of ensuring that marginalised stakeholders are continuously involved in planning and development efforts. Ultimately, employing this as a theoretical underpinning provides a lens through which the importance of stakeholder cohesiveness in the tourist guiding subsector can be understood, and how this can be leveraged to facilitate inclusive development (Nicolaides, 2015).

The second theoretical construct underpinning this research is inclusivity, or inclusive development, which has been proposed as both an aspirational idea and an analytical concept (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020). Certainly, research highlighting the fundamental importance of inclusivity— the guiding principle of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)— directly acknowledges the historical exclusion of marginalised communities within tourism (Schevyens and Biddulph, 2018; Lekgau et al., 2025; Nyanjom et al., 2018; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020). Given South Africa's exclusionary history, which has resulted in uneven and inequitable participation of stakeholders in the tourism sector, efforts within the broader tourism industry, particularly in the tourist guiding subsector, are now concentrated on promoting inclusivity and transformation

(Rogerson, 2025). The concept of inclusive development seeks to ensure equitable participation of relevant stakeholders, particularly those who have been previously marginalised (Sánchez-Soriano et al., 2024). Identifying relevant stakeholders for inclusivity in the subsector is not the sole important step that must be undertaken. The boundaries of inclusivity extend towards the meaningful involvement of the identified stakeholders, ensuring that all stakeholders collaborate synergistically towards a common goal. This underscores the significance of stakeholder cohesiveness for inclusive tourism development (Trilaksono et al., 2025; Bama and Nyikana, 2021). In the context of the current study, stakeholders identified originate from various backgrounds, encompassing the public and private sectors, as well as civil society. Aligning on shared goals, responsibilities, and roles presents a complex issue.

The tourist guiding subsector in South Africa
The environment within which tourist guides operate is volatile, characterised by various impacts and challenges. In the South African context, despite the importance of this profession within the tourism industry, tourist guides encounter additional challenges stemming from the country's tumultuous past (De Beer et al., 2014; Van der Merwe, 2016). Challenges related to barriers to entry in the industry - specifically those pertaining to race, gender, and differently abled individuals (i.e. previously disadvantaged groups) - along with regulatory requirements for the qualifications of tourist guides, represent significant obstacles that the tourist guiding subsector in South Africa must confront (Kapa et al., 2023).

Democratic South Africa's economic policy promotes economic inclusivity and social equality as principles for restoring socio-economic order, in light of the imbalances and structural inequalities that resulted from the apartheid regime (Rogerson, 2013; Mofokeng et al., 2018). The tourism sector has been identified by the government as a strategic area for achieving the country's broad socio-economic and transformation objectives (Department of Tourism, 2020). Tourism, with its extensive entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, ranks among the largest contributing sectors to South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) (Abrahams, 2019; Adinolfi et al., 2018). Crucially, it has the potential to provide employment to vulnerable groups within society, including women, individuals with disabilities, those with inadequate literacy and skill levels, and those residing in rural communities (Harilal and Nyikana, 2019). Additionally, tourism serves as a significant foreign exchange earner, thereby stimulating the broader economy through its direct, indirect, and induced spinoffs (Nyawo, 2020; South African Tourism, 2020).

The tourism sector encompasses multifaceted stakeholders across five subsectors: travel agencies and tour operators; transport services; accommodation establishments; entertainment facilities; and other support and indirect services, often referred to as tourism supply chains (South African Tourism, 2020:7; Rahmiati et al., 2019; Butowski, 2021; González-Torres et al., 2021; Ferreira and Perks, 2020), with tourist guides forming an integral segment of this tourism supply chain (Nyawo, 2020). Consistent with De Beer's (2011) assertion that the profession of tourist guiding remains male-dominated, primarily composed of elderly Caucasians, Kapa et al. (2022a) note that the majority of tourist guides in South Africa are middle-aged men, thereby

emphasising the necessity for transformation within the subsector, with a focus on inclusivity of previously disadvantaged individuals. Furthermore, those engaged in tourist guiding often transition from other careers and professions, having been drawn into the profession by, among other factors, a desire for travel and a passion for biodiversity, culture, and people (De Beer, 2011).

Tourist guides generally depend on, and primarily sustain themselves through, proceeds generated from their tourist guiding activities, executed either as independent/freelance operators or as direct contract employees of tour operating companies. This situation raises concerns regarding the financial viability of being a tourist guide, particularly in the context of widespread financial vulnerability, a legacy of the apartheid regime, affecting previously disadvantaged individuals. Studies further indicate that their remuneration is primarily determined by their skills and experience, as well as their capabilities, and secondarily by other factors such as personality traits and language skills (Mbatha et al., 2021; De Beer et al., 2014). Therefore, there is a clear need to strategically grow the subsector, concentrating on how new talent can be nurtured while ensuring that the subsector offers opportunities for viable career development. A crucial aspect of this, and a starting point, would be to engage all relevant stakeholders within the subsector to leverage the skills and resources available. It is from this perspective that the present paper was conceptualised, emphasising the importance of stakeholder cohesiveness for inclusive development in the tourist guiding subsector.

The role of tourist guides in South Africa

In South Africa, tourist guides are recognised as brand ambassadors of the tourism sector (Mbatha et al., 2021), tasked with delivering quality service to visitors in such a manner as to encourage return visits from tourists to the destination where they are based, as well as to elicit associated positive recommendations (Látková et al., 2018). Through their commentary on the relevant destinations and their interactions with visitors, tourist guides are perceived as playing a key role in the sector by enhancing visitors' knowledge about the destinations involved.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) of 1996 [2002] mandates numerous requisite employment protocols to be established by South African employers across all subsectors. Notably, in the case of tourist guides, only those enrolled in the formal staff establishments of the tourism supply chain are afforded protection under the provisions of the Act. This situation indicates that many tourist guides are disadvantaged in accessing benefits such as leave, regulated working hours, competitive remuneration, and overtime benefits, which are prescribed by law, primarily due to their status as independent contractors/freelancers. Additionally, the report by Ramphele (2020) and other articles (see De Beer, 2011; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2014; Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2020) document shortcomings in the current state of the tourist guide profession. Of significance is the inadequacy of documentation relating to the legislation governing tourist guiding activities, and the regulation of such by the relevant authorities; poorly recorded transformation milestones; a lack of professionalisation; and the limited amount of academic research available on the topic.

Accurate and up-to-date statistics concerning tourist guides in South Africa are not widely accessible; however, in 2017, the number of registered

tourist guides was reported to be 10,000 (Kapa et al., 2022b), with more recent statistics suggesting that there were approximately 14,000 guides across the country in 2023. Although this increase has occurred in contrast to pre-COVID-19 figures, a significant proportion of existing guides are noted as being unregistered (Hes, 2023), with only about 60% of the total number of tourist guides being fully registered and active at the time of this report. Regarding their work status, many tourist guides are employed either full-time or part-time, while others are self-employed (with registered businesses or as sole proprietors). In most cases, the latter scenario applies, with the guides tending to operate independently as freelancers (Ramphele, 2020). This situation highlights one of the most significant challenges that the subsector must address, which ultimately pertains to the registration of guides.

Challenges in the tourist guiding subsector

Stakeholders within the South African tourist guiding subsector encounter numerous challenges, stemming from a historical context that has resulted in socio-economic difficulties, as well as from interactions between stakeholders from different spheres, or even within the same sphere, who may work at cross purposes. The noted lack of coordination constitutes a significant impediment that hampers the efficiency of the subsector, ultimately diminishing its capacity to achieve strategic goals effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, the resultant scarcity of tourist guides in the subsector due to the COVID-19 pandemic remains a considerable challenge faced by the subsector (Mbatha et al., 2021; Nyawo, 2020). This situation has implications for succession planning within the subsector, further underscoring the necessity of strategic stakeholder cohesiveness, not only to ensure continuity within the subsector but also to facilitate inclusive development.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative approach, utilising in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from the tourist guiding subsector in South Africa. These stakeholders, purposively selected, included various representatives from national government, provincial registrars, and representatives of tourist guiding associations from the private sector. The cross-section of selected stakeholders permitted the exploration of diverse perspectives regarding the importance of stakeholder cohesiveness, as well as the challenges encountered in achieving such cohesiveness. Ultimately, understanding these varied perspectives, particularly from both administrative and practical viewpoints, is essential for fostering inclusive development in the tourist guiding subsector. Within the South African context, the tourist guiding subsector is niche, comprising tourist guides, government authorities such as one national registrar, nine provincial registrars, and four associations specifically for tourist guides. As the study focuses on inclusive development and transformation within the subsector, stakeholders responsible for providing enabling conditions were approached to participate in this research, namely registrars and associations. As detailed in Table 1 below, a total of 14 in-depth interviews were conducted from January to February 2024, with interview questions centred on understanding their roles within the subsector, areas of collaboration, and challenges and opportunities in the growth and development of the subsector. Each participant was allocated a

code to maintain anonymity. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic content analysis. Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, was also employed to enhance the analysis of the data and identify relevant themes.

Table 1. Research participants and rationale for their inclusion

Participants	Participant codes	Rationale for inclusion
National Registrar	**P1**	The National Registrar collaborates with all Provincial Registrars to promote the advancement and transformation of the guiding subsector. Due to their role in overseeing the development of the subsector and monitoring trends, they were deemed crucial for providing insight into transformation in the subsector from a national perspective.
Provincial Registrars	**P2–P9**	The provincial registrars are responsible for the registration and renewal of tourist guides in their respective provinces and operate under the directives of the National Registrar's office. Given the varied contexts within these provinces and their closer contact with tourist guides, these provincial registrars were instrumental in providing contextual perspectives on transformation within the subsector.
Tourism Industry Experts	**P10–P11**	Tourism industry experts included individuals who were tourist guides and who work closely with tourist guiding associations and tourist guides themselves.
Tourist Guide Associations	**P12–14**	The various tourist guiding associations represent the different facets of the subsector, namely, types of guiding and professionalisation within the subsector. Generally, the associations advocate for the views of their representative members, assist in the training and development of tourist guides, and promote the professionalisation of the subsector. Their position within the subsector bridges the gap between tourist guides and governing authorities (registrars), enabling them to provide a holistic overview of contemporary issues in the subsector.

RESULTS

The importance of stakeholder cohesiveness was underscored by participants, being central to the growth and development of the tourist guiding subsector. Key themes related to this were identified in the data analysis and included the significance of all stakeholders in the subsector, the role of stakeholders and collaboration among stakeholders, and the facilitation of such collaboration.

Recognising the Importance of All Stakeholders in the Subsector

The tourism industry comprises numerous stakeholders, which extend into the tourist guiding subsector. Apart from the tourist guides themselves, various stakeholders from the public sector (government) and the private sector (associations) are essential to the operation, management, and achievement of the strategic vision of the subsector. It was widely acknowledged that all stakeholders are important, with this importance relating to their roles and responsibilities. However, an important observation that emerged was that some stakeholders were regarded as 'more important' than others – a perception that requires clarification. Each stakeholder within the subsector has specific roles and responsibilities, thus solidifying their importance. The diverse skills, competencies, and contexts that various stakeholders contribute highlight their significance and represent the diversity of the subsector. This diversity allows for

dynamism to be embedded within the subsector, enabling stakeholders to learn from one another and leverage opportunities for the benefit of the subsector. However, this can only be realised when all stakeholders recognise each other's importance and are willing to engage. Participants acknowledged the significance of tourist guides as stakeholders, stating, *"the tourist guide has an important role to play, in terms of social interaction, safety and to provide information and tell stories that are unique and interesting." (P5)*

Moreover, the significance of all stakeholders from both the public and private sectors was emphasised, as evidenced by their interactions. One participant stated, *"I got invited in November to do a presentation online to all the registrars about what we do...so that we are all aware" (P11).*Creating awareness among all stakeholders facilitates optimal resource utilisation, fostering synergy within the subsector.

Recognising the importance of all stakeholders will dispel the notion of inequality between them and promote an understanding that each stakeholder group contributes uniquely to the operation of the subsector. A participant noted, "*the industries are willing to come to the party*" (P12), indicating the readiness of stakeholders to collaborate. This highlights the knowledge-sharing that results from recognising the importance of all stakeholders, as well as how varied perspectives can be advantageous in planning for and implementing strategies to ensure transformation within the subsector. While the tourism sector is driven by the National Department of Tourism, other stakeholders, particularly within the private sector, play a crucial role in executing the Government's strategic vision for the sector. Thus, recognising the importance of all stakeholders is an essential contextual component for the long-term strategic development of the subsector.

The Role of Stakeholders in the Subsector

The role of each stakeholder group is crucial to ensuring that the strategic vision of the subsector is achieved. It is through a clear understanding of these roles that stakeholders are empowered to act in their various capacities for the transformative development of the subsector. However, whilst this is theoretically understood by participants interviewed there is a lack of understanding regarding the roles (and responsibilities) of various stakeholders and positions within the organisational structure. Consequently, there are numerous inefficiencies in stakeholders performing their roles, with some placing an undue burden of over-reliance on others, causing a domino effect within the subsector. This concern is encapsulated by the following quote: *"I don't think the understanding of roles and responsibilities is there. You will find that registrars, provincial registrars, rely a lot on the department, and the department has a very different role to play in managing the affairs of tourist guides, but you will find an over-reliance on the national department, in terms of their understanding or execution of some of their roles and responsibilities"* (P1).

Another key issue that emerged was stakeholders themselves not fully comprehending their roles within the subsector and how these fit into the strategic vision for the sector's development. To accelerate this understanding, stakeholders must possess a comprehensive awareness of their contexts - whether that be the province in which they operate or the type of tourist guiding and guides with whom they work. Such awareness will inform the type of

assistance required for potential and existing guides to advance the sustainable and strategic development of the subsector, ultimately contributing to the growth of the cohort of tourist guides in the country. This is particularly important, given the differing contexts of the various provinces, which necessitate a tailored approach to the support rendered. For instance, one participant highlighted:

"I don't think there is an understanding that in their (registrars') own provinces, tourist guiding can be one of those aspects where we can create jobs for the country. The exercise of someone being here, wanting to apply but not meeting the criteria, leading to their decline, is not productive. There needs to be a focus on how I can help this person. How can I assist this person to obtain this registration?" (P1).

Furthermore, tourist guides, as the primary actors within the subsector, play a crucial role in the larger tourism sector. Simply put, tourist guides act as hosts to tourists, ambassadors of the country, and bearers of historical and local knowledge and stories. The importance of this role should be fully appreciated, as it is central to the growth and development of the broader tourism sector itself. Such perspectives are exemplified by the following two quotes:

"I think if you look at what the guide does in any guest experience or visitor experience in this country, they are our ambassadors, full stop"

(P13), and "Feedback from tourists, especially international tourists, indicates that the tourist guide has an important role to play in terms of social interaction, safety, and providing information and narratives that are unique and interesting" (P5).

It was also noted that the various tourist guide associations play a vital role, particularly in the training and continuous development of tourist guides, demonstrating efficiency in their daily operations. Their effectiveness appears to stem from the clarity they possess regarding their role within the subsector and what is within their capacity to achieve, as shown by one participant stating: *"They (tourist guide associations) manage this efficiently. They play an active role and know their responsibilities"* (P1).

The efficiency of associations is underpinned by their organisational structures, as well as their networks of skilled individuals across the country. This enables them to mentor tourist guides within their organisation, ensure the transfer of essential skills and training, and engage in forward-thinking regarding succession planning within the subsector. One association representative underscored: *"We are very strong in terms of our structure. It is a choice to belong to the organisation, but the real value lies in the mentorship and support provided. We take guides from entry level to a professional level, thereby offering a definitive career path"* (P13).

The roles of government stakeholders, particularly provincial registrars, extend beyond merely maintaining a database of registered guides. For various government stakeholders, their primary roles are inherently linked to fulfilling legislative requirements. Thus, responsibilities encompass aspects of training, continuous development, marketing of guiding opportunities, succession planning within the subsector, and mentorship - all conducted with the goal of transformation, as exemplified in the two quotes below from provincial registrars:

"As a tourist guide registrar… [my role] is to promote and develop the tour guiding subsector in the province through training programmes, capacity building,

*and access to market opportunities. I am also responsible for ensuring that the
tourist guide complies with the act when providing guiding services and that
tourists are kept safe wherever they go with them. Other support functions I
provide include attending association or forum meetings as a representative of the
government and playing a supportive role in addressing their requests for
assistance" (P9).*

*"Registrars assist tourist guides in accessing funding, addressing
compliance matters (such as tax and renewal of registrations), and providing
training opportunities for tourist guides. Additionally, we advocate for the
development and maintenance of attractions"* (P4).

This, however, is a significant undertaking that necessitates the input and
support of other stakeholders, such as associations, emphasising the
importance of the roles of all stakeholders within the subsector. Leveraging the
skills, competencies, and reach of associations can be extremely beneficial for
the fulfilment of legislative requirements by the government.

It is evident that provincial registrars play a crucial role in organisation,
management, and overall coordination within the subsector. The extensive range
of responsibilities associated with registrars' roles indicates that there should be
an equivalent level of empowerment corresponding to these responsibilities.
However, a concern raised was the limited capacity of registrars to make
decisions or act independently, relating to *the statement: "Registrars need to be
given some discretionary power, because they ultimately become accountable for
what has or has not been accomplished"* (P6). Another concern raised pertains to
the extent of assistance expected from registrars by guides. This highlights the
need for clarity regarding the roles of guides and their expected contributions to
the subsector. Becoming a guide represents a viable career path, particularly
with the assistance of government and the facilitation of associations. However,
it requires hard work, continuous training, innovation, and dedication from the
guides themselves:

*"The government is here to facilitate and assist guides in becoming
economically active by providing them with skills and networking opportunities.
However, we cannot do more than facilitate guides to become economically active;
it is ultimately an individual decision"* (P9).

Thus, the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the subsector
ultimately contribute to supporting tourist guides themselves and, by extension,
the tourism sector at large. It is important to note that the success of the tourist
guiding subsector is a direct contributor to the success of the country's tourism
sector. The growth and promotion of tourism is a significant strategy within the
country and therefore requires substantial input and collaboration from all
stakeholders.

Collaboration among Stakeholders in the Subsector

Drawing on the foregoing results, it is evident that the functioning of the
subsector is dependent on several diverse stakeholders. Thus, effective
collaboration among stakeholders becomes a key success factor for achieving a
transformed subsector. The manner in which collaboration occurs is important,
as is with whom collaborative efforts are undertaken. For example, in addition to
the stakeholders discussed above, collaboration with other government
departments to further the objective of increasing awareness of the subsector

among prospective guides would be essential. This would assist in promoting the uptake of guides in the future, thereby ensuring continuity within the profession. Collaboration with the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education could be beneficial in embedding information about the subsector into curricula for learners, who can then begin to view tourist guiding as a viable career path. In this way, a broader view of the development of the subsector is adopted, focusing on potential guides rather than solely on the continuation of existing guides. In this regard, one participant expressed the following view:

"I believe that enhanced collaboration and a clear definition of the roles of education and training are essential. It is imperative that our educational and training programmes are designed to empower individuals to pursue careers in guiding or utilise it as a livelihood. Our focus should not be solely on those already within our organisation; rather, we should seek to foster greater collaboration with the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education. Our efforts should centre on creating opportunities for prospective guides at the educational stage when learners are making decisions about their future courses". (P1)

A significant issue identified by one participant is the current lack of collaboration among stakeholders, many of whom attempt to operate independently but face challenges due to decision-making and capacity constraints. One *participant remarked, "We are not initiating enough collaboration and partnership initiatives. We work in silos." (P8).* This has led to considerable inefficiencies within the system, with numerous stakeholders striving towards a common goal but doing so in isolation and *ineffectively.* This situation underscores the necessity for collaboration among various governmental and private sector actors, all of whom contribute to the development and management of the tourist guiding subsector. Collaborative efforts can enhance developmental efficiencies, allowing stakeholders to leverage one another's initiatives to improve various plans and strategies. Despite an awareness of the importance of collaboration, an element of friction persists. Some stakeholders, having encountered difficulties, are keen to expand their portfolios and be active within the subsector. Nevertheless, this approach can be perceived by governmental stakeholders as an attempt to monopolise the subsector, thereby diminishing the role of government. In this context, participants expressed the following views:

"There are many aggressive voices within the industry." (P14)

"We are not in that space, and the private sector is attempting to lead. If they take the lead, they will, of course, dictate the course of action in terms of serving their own interests." (P6)

The current state of independent operations among actors does not facilitate the growth and transformation of the subsector. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of this is the demotivation of guides and other involved stakeholders, resulting in their disinvestment in the subsector: *"It's going to discourage people from entering the industry, and individuals become increasingly frustrated by the* numerous obstacles." (P13). This sentiment was echoed by another participant, who highlighted the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders, particularly for the purpose of providing comprehensive training to tourist guides. At present, there appears to be a disconnect, as those who offer training often lack current hands-on experience as tourist guides, as one participant *noted: "There was significant segregation; even the training providers do not actively engage in guiding."* (P12). This results in guides receiving

suboptimal training, particularly as the context in which tourist guides operate is dynamic and subject to numerous changes.

Another facet of collaboration pertains to establishing relationships with relevant stakeholders to effectively target the intended demographic of future tourist guides. For instance, partnering with the National Department of Education to ensure representation at Career Expos by the National Department of Tourism would facilitate widespread exposure of the subsector and promote tourist guiding as a viable career path for youth. One participant recounted: *"The department's presence at the national Tourism Career Expo, with a focus on guiding, was excellent, as it addresses the critical issue of engaging with youth and introducing them to the* field." (P14). It was further noted that collaborations aimed at attracting new or potential guides should be strategic to ensure that these efforts result in an increase in the number of guides entering the subsector. This is particularly crucial given the substantial costs associated with such events and marketing initiatives. Therefore, the outcomes must yield an increase in new guides who will not only enter but also remain within the subsector. In addition to collaborating with government departments, it is vital to consider partnerships with local organisations across various regions. This approach will facilitate awareness of opportunities within the subsector among previously disadvantaged individuals, particularly women and other marginalised groups. Such initiatives can be supported through collaboration between provincial registrars and various organisations, including local social groups, leveraging traditional community structures or partnerships with associations that maintain strong community ties.

The critical role of registrars as key stakeholders has been illustrated in the preceding discussion. Although the role of registrars is predetermined, its implementation may vary across provinces. Given the local context in each province, collaboration with stakeholders, facilitated by registrars, cannot adopt a 'one size fits all' approach. This highlights the necessity for all registrars to possess a comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities, the unique contexts of their provinces, and the capacity to enforce action and decision-making that will foster transformative growth within the subsector.

"Providing registrars with some degree of autonomy is crucial, as legislation permits such flexibility. However, we should adopt a targeted approach, collaborating with local tourism organisations and considering the demographic characteristics of our province, which is predominantly rural." (P6)

Facilitating Collaboration Among Stakeholders

The importance of facilitating collaboration for inclusivity was widely affirmed by participants, given the perceived under-transformed state of the subsector, as illustrated by the following quotes:

"In the adventure guiding sector, we consistently evaluate this through the lens of transformation. To some extent, the subsector remains significantly untransformed." (P11)

"In the field of adventure tour guiding, there exists a shortage of trained, experienced, reliable, and qualified guides. Overall, those who have swiftly and efficiently completed training and qualification tasks tend to be white, benefitting from quality education and the financial means to pay for training." (P10)

Participants emphasised several methods through which collaboration among stakeholders can be facilitated, enhanced, or increased. For instance, establishing clear and open pathways for communication and information sharing was identified as a fundamental aspect of collaboration. This includes keeping all stakeholders informed of changes within the subsector, particularly those driven by government initiatives. A lack of communication and clarity on these matters can hinder governmental, private sector, and other parties from functioning effectively as supportive structures and organisations within the subsector. This theme is also linked to the previously discussed necessity for stakeholders to have a clear understanding of their roles within the subsector.

"We have been working since 2014 but have only recently been invited to present on our activities." (P12)

"I do not believe there is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities... provincial registrars rely heavily on the department, which has a very different role in managing the affairs of tourist guides. They cannot perform this effectively..." (P1)

Another crucial consideration for facilitating collaboration among stakeholders is the provision of financial and other necessary support to enable them to implement plans for transformation across the subsector, as evidenced by the responses received:

"We require support to achieve this; we need a substantial cash injection. We possess the resources and have delivery partners throughout Southern Africa who are willing to assist, and we have already urged them to include previously disadvantaged candidates." (P13)

"We periodically assist individuals from marginalised communities with tourist guide training, although this is limited due to budget constraints." (P5)

DISCUSSION

The preceding results indicate a clear need for enhanced strategic collaboration among the diverse stakeholders in the tourist guiding subsector to achieve inclusive growth. The current state of the subsector continues to reflect the legacy of the apartheid regime, as well as the more recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kapa et al., 2023; Mbatha et al., 2021). Other significant challenges facing the subsector include the introduction of new qualifications for tourist guides, which has generated a degree of concern and confusion among the existing active cohort of guides (SATSA, 2024; Schultz, 2023).

An important outcome of the results is that each stakeholder in the subsector plays a significant role, from the recruitment of tourist guides to their training and long-term career development. The concept of broad-spectrum stakeholder involvement has been noted to be effective within the industry (Bama et al., 2022), with the goal of inclusive development. It is impossible for a single stakeholder to execute all the associated responsibilities due to capacity, skills, and financial constraints. Thus, leveraging the strengths and capabilities of various stakeholders is key to developing an inclusive tourist guiding subsector. The precarious state of the sector in the post-COVID-19 era (Nyawo, 2020), coupled with the systemic qualification changes in the subsector (SATSA, 2024; Schultz, 2023), presents an opportunity to re-examine how development is occurring and to aim towards inclusive growth. Recognising the importance of private stakeholders, such as those from tourist guiding associations and federations, is crucial to ensuring the development of reliable, authentic, and

knowledgeable tourist guides. It is also important to understand that for the subsector to be inclusive, it must be developed in a way that provides a viable and progressive career pathway for incoming individuals (Schultz, 2023). Many of the skills that tourist guides must possess are soft skills, which can only be developed over time.

Additionally, a degree of seasonality is embedded in the career of a tourist guide, necessitating guides to structure their finances in a way that allows them to continue in the career. This can be achieved through the professionalisation of the subsector to provide a livable wage for tourist guides, as well as by offering specific financial education and capacity building for guides that enables them to work under these circumstances (Kapa et al., 2023; Mbatha et al., 2021). Tourist guides are often referred to as hosts for tourists, responsible for creating memorable experiences and interactions (Hurombo et al., 2025), thus requiring them to be knowledgeable, flexible, authentic, and possess a flair for storytelling and relating to people from diverse backgrounds (Makopo et al., 2018). It must be acknowledged that not all individuals will fit this role. In doing so, attracting and onboarding potential candidates extends beyond merely including individuals from previously disadvantaged groups to encompass those who have the capability to grow and develop in this role as a career path (Kapa et al., 2022a).

All stakeholders have a role to play in the subsector, some of which are distinct and some of which overlap. It is essential that stakeholders internalise the primary goal of developing an inclusive subsector (i.e., inclusive development) to ensure that this objective is met (Sánchez-Soriano et al., 2024; Chiwawa and Wissink, 2023). Currently, there seems to be a degree of discord not only among the various stakeholder groups but also within the stakeholder domains. For example, it is widely acknowledged that government stakeholders drive the agenda towards a transformed and inclusive subsector (Tourism Sector Masterplan, 2023). However, there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding who is specifically responsible for what. In some cases where clarity exists, there is a lack of capacity (financial or human resources) to ensure that their mandate is fulfilled. Moreover, there seems to be a misconception that the private sector is attempting to hijack the mandate of government, thereby causing an element of friction. It is important that this issue is overcome, recognising that prioritising hierarchy in this instance will be detrimental to the inclusive development of the subsector. Given the various constraints of each stakeholder, it is crucial to leverage all forms of human and financial capital, as well as the experience of those who have been within the industry. Building trust between stakeholders is therefore of paramount importance, with the understanding that all stakeholders are working towards a common goal (see Lekgau et al., 2024; Bama and Nyikana, 2021). This can be facilitated by ensuring that all stakeholders have clarity on their roles and responsibilities within the subsector and by maintaining open lines of communication with other stakeholders (Rogerson, 2021).

Whilst government stakeholders drive the agenda of policy development for the subsector, the private sector is crucial for capacity building and skills development of incoming tourist guides, especially the different types of guides who have specific training and development needs (see Nyikana and Bama, 2023; Tourism Tattler, 2020). The wealth of knowledge accumulated within the private sector is a key component of continued, inclusive development, thereby emphasising the need for cohesiveness among stakeholders. The notion of

cohesiveness, through partnerships between the public and private sectors, is not a novel one and has long been touted as an exemplary framework for collaborative management and for leveraging the strengths of stakeholders (Litheko, 2022; Bama and Nyikana, 2021). The new qualification requirements for tourist guides, together with the move towards the professionalisation of the subsector and the reinstatement of it in the post-COVID-19 context, presents a new opportunity for the reestablishment of the subsector as one that is firmly rooted in inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the tourist guiding subsector is undeniable, with tourist guides playing a central role in the broader tourism sector nationally. The subsector was severely affected by the COVID-19-induced crisis, leaving a legacy of a lack of active, registered guides, as well as financial constraints for those who remained. The subsector also underwent a series of changes related to the necessary qualifications and training required for individuals to become registered guides. This was done with the end goal of professionalising the subsector, making it a viable career path. The effects of the crises and various changes within the subsector emphasised the need for a high level of cohesiveness and mutual support among all relevant stakeholders. This was a significant finding in the study due to the widespread agreement regarding the lack of awareness of stakeholders' roles and responsibilities within the subsector. This has had a detrimental impact on the ability of various stakeholders to achieve the objectives outlined in key tourism and transformation policies. As a result, stakeholder collaboration within the subsector was underlined as crucial in addressing the resource and capacity constraints felt by various role players in supporting the growth and transformation of the subsector. In this light, the study recommends establishing a professional body, which could include representatives from tour guiding associations, government, higher learning institutions, and tourist guides, to lead advocacy efforts for tourist guides and mobilise resources towards the goals of the subsector. Furthermore, while the research provided valuable insights by focusing on the stakeholders providing the support structure for the subsector, as opposed to the few existing studies that have only examined the views of the tourist guide (see Kapa et al., 2022a, 2022b; Hurombo et al., 2018; Mbatha et al., 2021), it underscores the need for further research attention on issues related to transformation and inclusion within this subsector, especially concerning the registration process and the challenges associated with attaining the necessary qualifications, which further hamper the participation of marginalised groups.

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