

# Assessing the Implication of Local Economic Development Initiatives on Job Creation in South Africa: A Case of Polokwane Local Municipality

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the paper is to assess the implication of Local Economic Development (LED) initiatives on job creation in South Africa. The aim of this paper is to determine the extent in which LED initiatives are effective in South African municipalities. The paper reflects on LED initiatives in Polokwane Local Municipality and assesses its contribution to job creation and poverty alleviation within the Municipality. LED was introduced to mitigate unemployment and poverty in South Africa. It has been two decades since the inception of LED in South Africa. However, there are still dire socio-economic conditions in the country. This paper is empirical and employed quantitative research approach. The paper used random sampling technique in which 370 questionnaires were distributed to beneficiaries of LED in the Municipality. The findings of the paper revealed that there is low rate of job opportunities created through LED initiatives and LED awareness in the Municipality is low as only half of the participants know the role of LED unit in the local economy. The paper argues that there are still high unemployment rates in South African municipalities with many individuals living in dire economic conditions despite the inception of LED. The paper therefore recommends that local municipalities must review the current LED initiatives and come up with reformed LED initiatives that will have high impact on creation of job opportunities and poverty alleviation. The paper further argues that there is also a need for agricultural and industrial park LED initiatives that will contribute to vast creation of jobs in the Municipality.

**Keywords:** Local Economic Development, Poverty, Unemployment

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## 1. Introduction

The South African government implemented Local Economic Development (LED) to mitigate unemployment and poverty rates in its quest for inclusive economic growth. The objective of LED in local government is to create job opportunities; increase tax base and revenue bases within the jurisdiction of municipalities (Masuku, Jili & Selepe, 2016; Koma, 2014). LED is perceived as an appropriate tool for sustainable development (Abrahams, 2002). South African municipalities work together with societies and private sector institutions to create job opportunities by using available local resources (Meyer, 2013). The South African government has set a target for inclusive economic growth in the country by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012). In terms of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, communities in South Africa must have better opportunities to fully participate in the socio-economic life of the country by the year 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012). To achieve this, the South African government have to invest in LED initiatives that are adequately effective to mitigate unemployment and poverty in the country.

Municipalities in South Africa have LED initiatives in place that are employed to create conducive environment for local economic growth. The goals of LED initiatives are to alleviate unemployment and poverty rates through job creation. Essentially, municipalities in South Africa provide a platform for Small Medium Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) to generate sustainable job opportunities at a larger scale. Municipalities in South Africa also provide a platform for informal traders to maintain their businesses and sustain their livelihood (South Africa Local Government Association, 2018). The LED initiatives in Polokwane Local Municipality assist SMMEs and informal traders within the municipal jurisdiction. South African government adopted LED in 1996 yet its impact is declining (Masuku, Jili & Selepe, 2016; Meyer-Stamer, 2009). The unemployment rate in South Africa is 29.1% in which Eastern Cape records 40.5%, followed by Free State with 38%, Northwest with 33.2%, Gauteng with 30%, KwaZulu-Natal have 26.9% and Limpopo with 23.6% (Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), 2020). Limpopo Province is leading in South Africa with 67,5% of adults living in poverty followed by Eastern Cape with 67,3%, KwaZulu-Natal with 60,7% and North West with 59,6% (Stats SA, 2019).

The high unemployment and poverty rates in South Africa raises a concern on the impact LED has on job creation. The unemployment and poverty rate raises a question: to what degree do LED initiatives have an impact on job creation in Polokwane Local Municipality? In answering the question raised above, the paper investigate types of LED initiatives and its impact on job creation in South African Municipalities and analyse the extent in which beneficiaries of LED in Polokwane Local Municipality understand the role of LED unit in the local economy.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Policy Regulation for LED in the South African Context**

LED initiatives in South African municipalities are designed and implemented in line with national policy for LED in South Africa. There are number of policies that regulate the implementation of LED. According to section 152 (c) and 153 (a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) mandate the local government to promote the socio-economic development of communities in the society and it must manage its administration and its budgetary processes in order to provide basic needs of its communities. The White Paper on Local Government (1998), introduced the notion of developmental local government in which it characterised a developmental government as government that is committed to work together with citizens and groups in the community in order to accomplish sustainable socio-economic development (White paper on Local Government, 1996). The White Paper on Local Government also encourages local government in South Arica to create conducive environment for job creation in South Africa. The Local Government Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 mandates and stipulates the functions of LED. Local government employ the abovementioned legislative and policy frameworks as a guideline to plan and implement LED initiatives.

### **2.2 Typology of LED Initiatives in South African Municipalities**

LED initiatives serve as the corridor that municipalities use to provide a conducive environment for economic activities. LED initiatives promote job creation in communities through entrepreneurship, tourism attraction and investment attraction

(Masuku, Jili & Selepe, 2016). LED initiatives in Polokwane Local Municipality include enterprise development, trade and licencing promotion of tourism attraction as well as investment promotion and attraction. The LED unit in Polokwane Local Municipality has different organs of LED which comprises of abovementioned LED initiatives. All these elements of LED create conducive environment for creation of job opportunities in the municipalities. Such initiatives are said to enable sustainable economic activities. The following are types of LED initiatives in South African Municipalities.

#### **2.2.1 Investment Promotion**

Municipalities in South Africa have investment promotion and attraction strategies in place to enhance the local economic growth (Bezuidenhout, 2015). The local government in South Africa attract investors by mobilising investment opportunities in its jurisdiction. The LED unit in Polokwane Local Municipality attract and influence SMMEs to select the Municipality as their location for their businesses. Municipalities provide adequate information to potential investors in order to create a long term relationship with the investors (Lim, 2008). Generation of investment, policy advocacy, investor aftercare, image building are the core factors of investment promotion (Harding & Monsrud, 2020; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018). Local government construct development zones in order to attract investment (Wu, Xu & Feng, 2018). Local government use measures such as fiscal incentives to attract foreign investors in host economies (Qian & Weingast, 2005). Industrial development, standard of living in communities and economic growth are the factors that drive and influence investment promotion (Wei, Sun, Zhang & Ouyang, 2020). Political and economic stability are also the factors that attract foreign investors (Pauceanu, 2016). Investment promotion is an element of industrial policy which seeks to increase the injection rate of foreign direct investment (Harding & Monsrud, 2020). Investment expands the drive of job creation and productivity in the economy. It is empirically proven that countries with foreign direct investment have higher economic growth (Antwi, Gyebi & Boateng, 2013). Foreign direct investment contributed to high productivity and vast creation of jobs in China (Tseng & Zebregs, 2002). The effect of investment promotion on the injection of direct foreign investment is enormous (Andrew & Nicholas, 2007). The rationale of investment promotion is to mitigate

imperfect markets in local economy (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018). However, foreign investors tend to lack regional information such as tax, business partner and competition in host economy (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015).

### **2.2.2 Tourism Promotion**

Tourism boost local economies as it contributes to the creation of job opportunities and increases sales of SMMEs in the local economies (Nissa, Galindo & Mendez, 2011). Tourism sector in South Africa is perceived as a catalyst for job creation (National Planning Commission, 2012). Developing countries could improve their economic growth by strengthening its tourism sector (Fayissa, Nsiah, & Tadasse, 2007). The tourism sector is adequate for economic growth in developing countries and not for developed countries (Jaun, Luis, Martin & Riccard, 2004). Makochekanwa (2013) analysed the contribution of tourism on economic growth in Southern African Developing Community (SADC) countries and found that tourism significantly contribute to GDP, creation of job opportunities, exports trade and investment injection in SADC countries. However, Ren, Can, Paramati, Fang & Wu (2019), analysed the impact of tourism on economic growth in 24 North American and middle east countries from the year 2001 to 2009 and found that tourism have a positive impact on economic growth. This finding contradicts the assertion that tourism does not have impact on economic growth in developed countries. Globally, tourism is perceived as the job creation tool (Sharpely, 2009; Santos & Khan, 2018). Developing countries should mirror the tourism attraction and promotion strategies of developed countries in order to significantly contribute to economic growth of their countries. Investment in tourism is insufficient for economic growth (Du, Lew & Pin, 2016). The impact of tourism on economic growth depends on the specialisation of tourism in the country (Pablo-Romeo & Molina, 2013). Croes (2013) conducted a study on tourism specialisation in Small Island and found out that tourism specialisation enhance economic growth. However, Croes, Ridderststaat, Bak & Zientara (2020) argues that tourism specialisation have a short term effect on economic growth. The extent in which tourism specialisation affect the economic growth is contingent on the level of economic growth of a host country (De Vita & Kyaw, 2017). Employment in South African tourism sector is often characterised by low skills labour force and career stagnation (Booyens, 2020). There is a gap

in managerial, financial and soft skills needed for innovation in the tourism sector (Booyens, Motala & Ngandu, 2020). There is a need for training and skills development programmes in order to enhance tourism attraction in South Africa. Soft skills should be prioritised in the skills development programmes as it plays a significant role in the tourism sector (Sahbir & Sharma, 2019). The skills development programmes will ultimately improve the job creation in South African tourism sector.

### **2.2.3 Enterprise Development**

Entrepreneurship in local communities is guided by the drive to create socio-economic value by using local resources in an innovative and efficient manner (Mahfuz-Ashraf, Razzaque, Liaw, Ray & Hasan, 2018). Entrepreneurs make use of resources that were underused to more usage of local resources. Municipalities provide entrepreneurship education to aspiring and established entrepreneurs in the Municipality. Entrepreneurship is recognised as the engine of sustainable economic development (He, Lu & Qian, 2018). The significance of entrepreneurs evident in economic development in developed countries has inspired developing countries to adopt entrepreneur development (Dhaliwal, 2016). Financial return, social network, innovative mission and social network are elements of social entrepreneurship (Javed, Yasir & Majid, 2019). Entrepreneurship plays the following roles in economic development: create job opportunities at a larger scale; reduces monopolistic economic activities; Wealth creation and distribution; increases Gross National Product; improve standard of living; promotes the country's export trade; ensures inclusive economic activities, however, the competence of entrepreneurs affects economic growth (Dhaliwal, 2016). Low quality entrepreneurs and loss of confidence as well as direction negatively affect entrepreneurship in economic development (Ranjan, 2019). Entrepreneurship can be enhanced through skills development and capacity building with emphasis on innovations development programmes (Naude, 2013). The foundation of innovation is entrepreneurship which improves competition and productivity in the economy (Geneva, 2005). The support programmes provided by local government create conducive environment for economic activities and does not substitute the declining markets (Geneva, 2005). Hence the government programmes should put more emphasis on innovation. This will improve the rate of confidence and direction in social entrepreneurship.

### **2.2.4 Informal Trading and Licensing**

South African local government offer trading permits to individuals who operate informal businesses (SALGA, 2018). The municipalities use the trading permits to regulate informal trading. The Business Act 71 of 1991 recognises street vending as entrepreneurs who contribute to economic development. People sell in the street as a source of employment (Hlengwa, 2016), they sustain themselves and their dependants (Bromley, 2000). The proceeds made by the street vendors is the key source of their household income (Mkhize, Dube & Skinner, 2013). Mazhambe (2017) assessed the contribution of street vendors on economic development in Zimbabwe and found that 86,6% of street vendors solely depended on street vending as their source of income. Mazhambe (2017) also found that street vendors contribute to economic growth through job creation, sell low cost goods to people with low income and provides the platform to generate alternative income. However, Bromley (2000) is of the view that street vending creates jobs at a lower rate and often people operate under infrastructure that is in hostile state. The city of Durban in South Africa has 3 in 10 street vendors have employed at least one person (Mkhize, Dube & Skinner, 2013). Street vendors use their profit to buy essential goods and services for both profit as well as personal purpose in the formal economy, linking street vendors to formal economy (Bromley, 2000; Mkhize, Dube & Skinner, 2013). Street vendor pay a monthly levy for trading in the local government jurisdiction (Mitullah, 2003). However, the street vendors rarely receive basic services and the only interaction street vendor with local officials is when they confiscate stock (Bromley, 2000). Street vendors exposed to poor shelter and weather elements which often threatens their wellbeing (Hunter & Skinner, 2003). Street vendors often operate under health hazardous environment (Ekanem, 1998; Mjoka & Selepe, 2017) despite the sufficient hygiene and safety practises that majority of street vendors know in South Africa (Kok & Ballkaran, 2014). Street vendors in South Africa adapt to political and socio-economic challenges in their setting (Gamielidien & van Niekerk, 2017).

## **3. Methodological Approach**

### **3.1 A Case Study of Polokwane Municipality**

The paper used Polokwane Local Municipality as its study area. The Polokwane Local Municipality is one

of the 278 municipalities in South Africa which seeks to provide socio-economic services and ensure quality life to all. The study area was selected based on the fact that Polokwane Local Municipality have a fully fleshed LED unit unlike other municipalities in Limpopo Province and the City of Polokwane is the economic hub of the province. Smaller municipalities in Limpopo Province were excluded in the study as it does not have fully flesh LED unit and often, have only one or two LED officers.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The paper employed quantitative research design and used structured questionnaires as data collection method. The paper employed quantitative research method as it enables the researcher to obtain generalised views of individuals based on their own experiences. Questionnaires were randomly distributed to 370 LED beneficiaries (street vendors and SMMEs) in Polokwane Local Municipality. The said questionnaires were analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010 and presented in graphs and tables. The paper observed research ethics and was granted ethical clearance by the University of Limpopo Turfloop Research Committee.

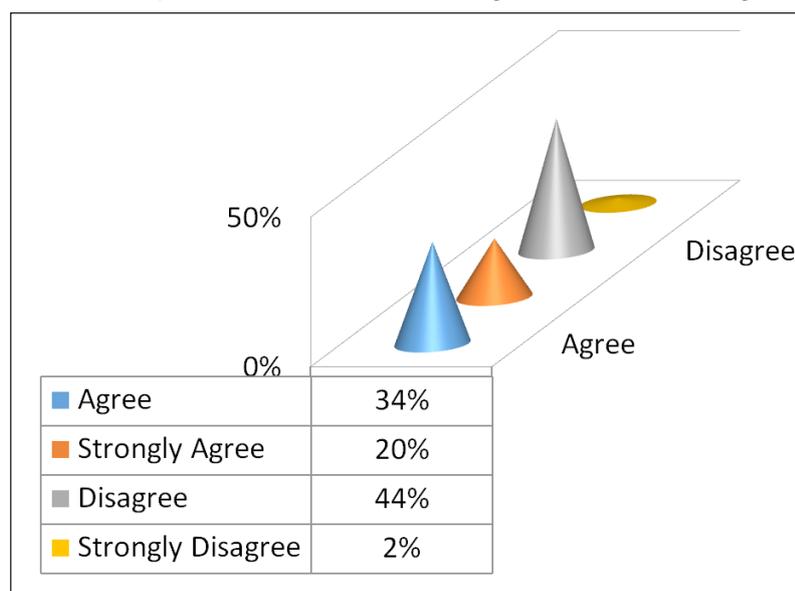
## **4. Results and Discussion**

370 questionnaires were randomly distributed to beneficiaries of LED (street vendors and SMMEs) in Polokwane Local Municipality. The beneficiaries of LED were identified as individuals who receive services from LED unit in Polokwane Local Municipality. The interpretation of the questionnaires is presented in statistical form. The purpose of collecting data from beneficiaries of LED was to assess the impact of LED initiatives on job creation in the jurisdiction of Polokwane Local Municipality.

### **4.1 LED Projects Create Jobs and Alleviate Poverty in the Community**

The LED is meant to create conducive environment for economic activities in local government. It seeks to encourage and facilitate job creation and alleviate of poverty. As such, its effectiveness is reflected by the capability of its beneficiaries to embody the objectives of LED in the Municipality. The Polokwane Local Municipality has a fully-fledged LED unit in the Limpopo Province and is therefore, anticipated to have low unemployment and poverty rate. The paper probed whether the beneficiaries

**Figure 1: LED Projects Embodies the Objectives of LED (Create Jobs and Alleviate Poverty in the Community)**



Source: Author

of LED create job opportunities in the community. Figure 1 shows the response of the participants.

The figure above indicates that the majority of participants agree (34%) followed by 20% of participants who strongly agree that their businesses create job opportunities. 44% of participants disagree and 2% of participants strongly disagree that their businesses create job opportunities. In total the study suggests majority of participants (54%) hold the view that their project embodies LED objectives, while 46% has a different perception. The findings suggest that 54% of LED beneficiaries create jobs in their businesses, while 46% of LED beneficiaries do not create job opportunities. The findings further suggest that the rate of job creation is not satisfactory almost half of the respondents (46%) do not create job opportunities. The findings correlate with the assertion that the impact of LED initiatives on job opportunities is declining (Masuku, Jili & Selepe, 2016).

#### 4.2 Confidence in the Effectiveness of LED Initiatives

The initiatives and strategies implemented by the LED unit directly affect the beneficiaries of LED. The implemented initiatives are used as a base for evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of the LED unit in the study. The LED unit initiatives should be grounded on national developmental policies

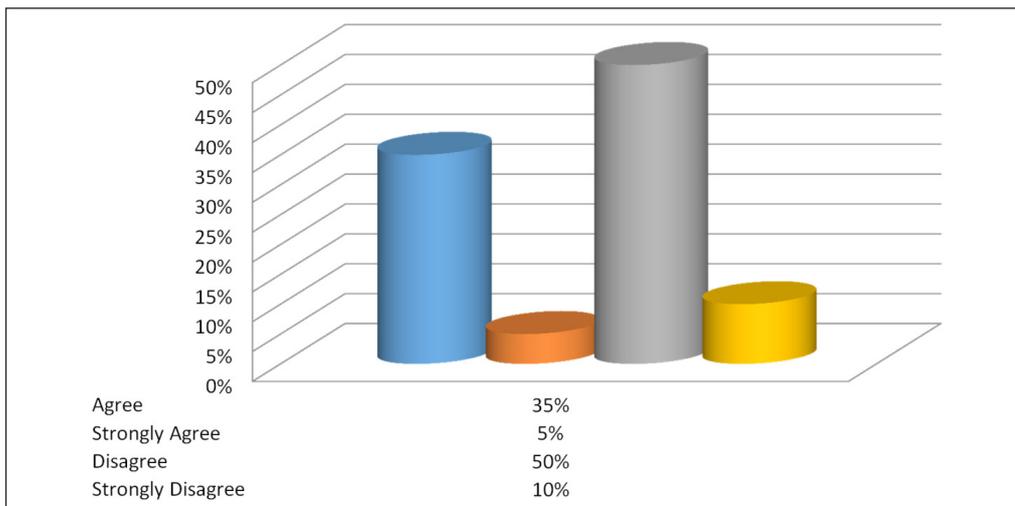
that aim to realise a developed economic state. The study investigates the effectiveness of LED initiatives implemented by LED in order to measure the impact of LED in the local economy. The findings show that initiatives taken by LED units are effective and are presented in Figure 2 on the following page.

Figure 2 indicates that 50% of participants disagree followed by 10% of participants who strongly disagree that LED initiatives are effective. 35% of participants agree, while 5% strongly agree and 5% that LED initiatives are effective in Polokwane Local Municipality. The findings suggest that 60% of participants are not in agreement that initiatives of LED are effective. A fraction of 40% is of the opinion that LED initiatives are effective. This may suggest that LED unit cannot maintain and sustain its services.

#### 4.3 The Role Played by the LED Unit

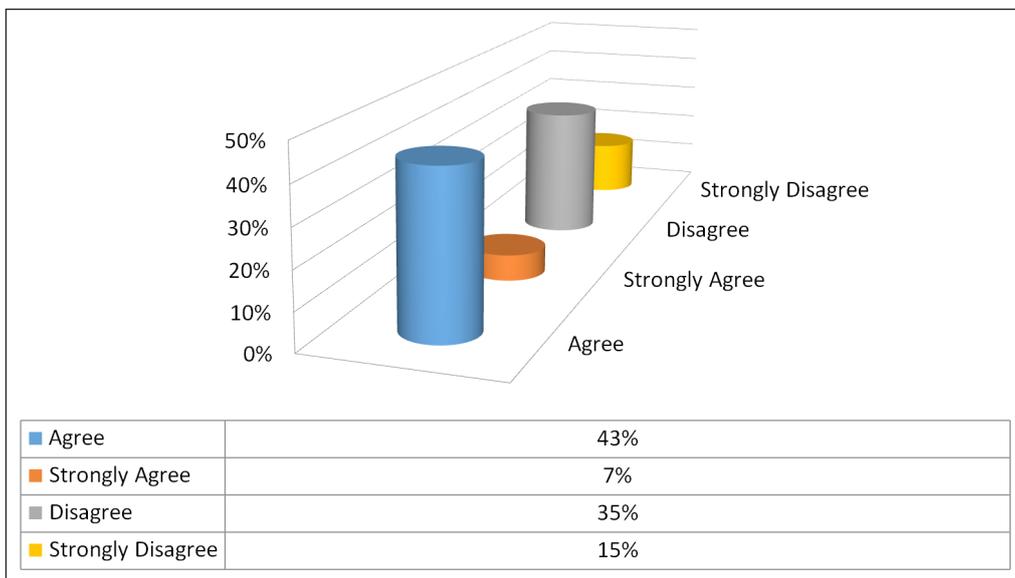
The paper probed whether beneficiaries of LED understand the role of LED Unit in order to evaluate the impact of LED on unemployment in communities. Since LED is an outcome-based policy, community members need to be aware and understand the role of local government in order to enforce the functionality of LED. This will ensure that LED has a greater impact on job creation in the municipal jurisdiction. The awareness of LED Unit in the Municipality will assist the researcher to evaluate the impact of LED initiatives on beneficiaries of LED.

**Figure 2: Confidence in the Effectiveness of LED Initiatives**



Source: Author

**Figure 3: The Role Played by LED Unit**



Source: Author

Figure 2 shows the degree in which LED beneficiaries understand the role that local government play in LED.

Figure 3 indicates that the majority of participants agree at 43% followed by 7% of participants that strongly agree they understand the role of LED unit. While 15% of participants strongly disagree and 35% of participants disagree that they understand the role of LED Unit. In total 50% of participants are of the view that they understand and 50% of the participants hold the view that they have little understanding of the role played by LED Unit. The results indicate that there is an equal percentage of participants understanding

and lack of understanding such role. The findings suggest that the awareness of LED is low in the Municipality as only half of the participants know and understand the role of LED unit. The findings indicate that there are different factors that hinder the dissemination of LED awareness in the Municipality. Masuku, Jili & Selepe (2016) are of the view that the factors affect the awareness of LED in the Municipality include that the communication breakdown from the Municipality and community members as well as some ward councillors only disseminate LED information to affiliates of their organisation and leave out the people who affiliated with opposition parties (Masuku, Jili & Selepe, 2016; Koma).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper discussed the LED initiatives and its impact on job creation in South Africa. It also assessed the extent in which LED beneficiaries understated the role of LED unit. The LED initiatives assist in creating job opportunities in Polokwane Local Municipality. However, the impact of LED initiatives in Polokwane Local Municipality has a less satisfactory impact rate on job creation. The impact is not overwhelming since it has been 24 years of LED practice in South Africa. It is quite notable that a Municipality do not create job opportunities directly. It relies more on different entrepreneurs in the Municipality to mitigate unemployment and poverty. Municipalities only create conducive environment for SMMEs. LED initiatives can have a maximum impact on job creation if LED initiatives are directed at creating job opportunities at a larger scale. More jobs can also be generated through LED initiatives if all community members understand and participate in LED initiatives. The LED initiatives in Polokwane Local Municipality are seemingly sound on paper and do not produce job opportunities at an anticipated rate.

The impact of LED initiatives on job creation in Polokwane Local Municipality is low since it has been two decades since the inception of LED. There should be 100% rate of LED beneficiaries that create job opportunities in the Municipality. The time frame since the inception of LED in South Africa gives the room for Municipalities to review and reform LED initiatives as well as strategies until the maximum impact of LED initiatives on job creation is achieved. The findings of the paper revealed that 54% of participants create job opportunities while 46% of participants do not create job opportunities. The typology of LED initiatives in South Africa Municipality does not produce sufficient job opportunities in a vast scale. The LED initiatives are only effective to a certain degree since the findings of the study revealed that 54% of LED beneficiaries are able to create job opportunities. The findings of the paper revealed that 60% of participants are of the view that LED initiatives are ineffective while 40% is of the view that LED initiatives are effective. The community members should be aware and know the role of LED units in the local economy and participate in LED initiatives for LED initiatives to reach its maximum impact. The paper reveals that only 50% of LED beneficiaries are aware and understand the role of LED units in Polokwane Local Municipality while 50% of LED beneficiaries are not aware of the role

of LED units. The findings suggest that the absence of LED knowledge amongst the beneficiaries of LED hinders the maximum impact of LED initiatives on job creation as only part of the community members participate in LED initiatives provided by the Municipality.

The paper recommends that the Municipality must establish LED initiatives that create job opportunities at a larger scale such as agriculture farms and industrial parks. Vidova (2010) conducted a study on the industrial parks in Slovakia and its influence on job creation and found that the establishment of industrial parks in Slovakia created new job opportunities. Vidova (2010) further state that in areas in which industrial parks were established had less unemployment rate compared to areas that do not have industrial parks. Moreover, Vidova (2010) asserts that industrial parks attract foreign investors in a host country. Yen Le, Pham, Thuy Cu, Pham, Dao (2017) conducted a study on the effect of industrial park on people's lives in Vietnam and found that the establishment of industrial parks increased the income of residents who resides next to the new industrial parks. Nyanga (2013) conducted a study on agriculture as a tool in Zimbabwe and found that agriculture has a great potential to grow job creation rate and that farmers should utilise new technologies in order to create more sustainable job opportunities. Imaenyin (2015) assert that agriculture farms in Nigeria employs 70% of the Nigerian population and the country specialises in yam tuber and cassava roots. Shortage of water and new technologies threatens the growth of job creation in South African agriculture farms, particularly timber farms (Clarke, 2018). Nubler is of the view that new technologies will create better and new job opportunities (Nubler, 2016).

The Municipality should review and reform LED initiatives in order to enforce the effectiveness of LED initiatives. Evaluating and measuring of work performance leads to achieving organisational objectives (Shobaki, Abu Naser, Salama, AlFerjany & Abu Amun, 2018). The review of the LED Initiatives will reveal the challenges encountered when implementing LED initiatives as well as factors contributing to decline in job creation. However, the performance management system is associated with lack of consistency (Agarwal, 2020). The Municipality must develop an effective reviewing strategy that will assist in enhancing SMMEs's rate of job creation. The degrees in which LED initiatives

are effective determine the rate in which jobs are created in South Africa. Therefore, the Municipality must develop LED initiatives that will create sustainable job opportunities at a larger scale.

Polokwane Local Municipality should establish a platform such as LED lekgotla (gathering) that will enable all community members to engage in LED. LED lekgotla should be used as a corridor to carry out the awareness of LED in the Municipality. The more people know of the opportunities that the Municipality offers to create sustainable job opportunities on local communities, the more people will engage in LED programme. For LED Lekgotla to be effective the Municipality must adopt effective communication tools that will enhance the communication between the Municipality and the community members. Bello, Lovelock and Carr (2016) identified public awareness, effective public participation techniques; decentralisation of organisations as factors that can enhance community participation. Community participation is crucial for responsiveness of community members and enhances accountability as well as transparency of public officials in service delivery (Thebe, 2016).

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