

Band-Aid measure on tourism sector

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There is a grim line in the war movie Apocalypse Now which, sadly, aptly describes the government's relationship with the tourism and hospitality industry: "We'd cut them in half with a machine gun and give them a Band-Aid..." The Covid-19 lockdowns have already cost the sector billions of rands in lost income and tens of thousands of jobs have gone – most never to return. If the current restrictions on the sale of alcohol and the night-time curfew are not relaxed soon, many businesses will not last another month. Some are probably going under as you read this.

The government, though, has seemingly offered a helping hand in committing to back the R1.2 billion Tourism Equity Fund.

That is a Band-Aid measure, given that the sector generated a turnover of about R400 billion annually.

It also doesn't come without strings as, clearly, this assistance will be used as a way to fast-track transformation in the industry.

While that is a laudable objective, surely we need to think about saving as many businesses as we can and "transforming" them later, rather than trying to grow new, empowered ventures. Shouldn't this be a time to focus on partnerships and mentoring for the survivors, however few there may be?