INVESTIGATING SETTLEMENT EXPANSION, THE QUALITY OF LIFE, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS IN A PERIPHERAL HOMELAND TOWN: THE CASE OF MKHUHLU, MPUMALANGA (SOUTH AFRICA)

by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled *"Investigating Settlement Expansion, the Quality of Life, and Socio-economic Trends in a Peripheral Homeland Town: The Case of Mkhuhlu, Mpumalanga (South Africa)"* is my original work. All sources consulted or quoted have been fully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic standards.

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Abstract

The apartheid regime in South Africa established homelands that produced distinctive settlement patterns, with peripheral settlements emerging as a key feature. Mkhuhlu, located within the former homelands under traditional land ownership, is characterised as a dispersed rural settlement with limited-service functions. The expansion of such settlements, combined with challenges in quality of life and socio-economic conditions, has strained service provision and contributed to unsustainable human development.

This study investigates whether a connection exists between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu, particularly in relation to socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation. To address this question, the research examines the historical and political context of Mkhuhlu, evaluates the impact of settlement growth on socio-economic conditions, and analyses transformations in quality of life during the post-apartheid era.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and household surveys. Data analysis using SPSS revealed notable gender disparities in subjective well-being: women reported higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and optimism compared to men. Furthermore, residents with tertiary education experienced fewer socio-economic challenges and a higher quality of life. Despite these findings, persistent inequalities continue to undermine well-being in Mkhuhlu.

The study recommends implementing a local economic development (LED) strategy and revitalising the Industrial Park to stimulate job creation and improve livelihoods. Collaboration between Bushbuckridge Local Municipality and the Hoxani Traditional Council is essential, alongside the establishment of a community business forum to oversee industrial activities. Such initiatives, supported by the Industrial Development Corporation's Industrial Park Revitalisation Programme, could address socio-economic disparities and enhance residents' quality of life.

Keywords: settlement expansion; quality of life; socio-economic trends; economic development; industrial revitalisation

Ku Andza ka Tindhawu ta Vaaki eMkhuhlu

Hlamuselo ya Nkoka (Xitsonga Abstract)

Hulumendhe wa mfumo wa xihlawuhlawu eAfrika Dzonga wu simekile tindhawu ta matiko (homelands), leswi swi endleke leswaku ku va na mindzulamiso yo hlawuleka ya tindhawu ta vaaki etikweni, laha tindhawu ta le makumu ku va yin'wana ya mindzulamiso leyi simekiweke eka tindhawu ta matiko. Mkhuhlu yi hlawuriwa tanihi ndhawu ya vaaki leyi nga na ntirho wo tsongo wa vukorhokeri naswona yi hlamuseriwa tanihi ndhawu ya le makaya leyi hlakanyeke, leyi kumekaka eka tindhawu ta matiko ta khale ehansi ka vukokorhi bya misava bya ndyangu. Ku andza ka tindhawu ta vaaki, xiyimo xa vutomi, na swiphiqo swa ikhonomi na swa vaaki swi khumba ku nyikiwa ka vukorhokeri naswona swi pfuna eka ku pfumala ku tiyimela ka tindhawu ta vaaki. Xivutiso xa nkoka xa ndzavisiso lowu a ku ri: Xana ku ni vuxokoxoko exikarhi ka ku andza ka tindhawu ta vaaki, xiyimo xa vutomi, na vukorhokeri bya muganga eMkhuhlu mayelana na mindzulamiso ya ikhonomi na ku pfuxetiwa ka mabhindzu?

Ku hlamula xivutiso lexi, ndzavisiso wu kambisile vuxokoxoko exikarhi ka ku andza ka tindhawu ta vaaki, xiyimo xa vutomi, na vukorhokeri bya muganga eMkhuhlu, ku kombisa ndlela leyi swi khumbaka mindzulamiso ya ikhonomi na matirhiselo ya ku pfuxeta mabhindzu. Ku hetisisa xikongomelo lexi, ndzavisiso wu kambisile matimu na xiyimo xa politiki xa Mkhuhlu, ku nyika xivumbeko xo twisisa mindzulamiso ya sweswi ya tindhawu ta vaaki na makhombo ya vukorhokeri. Wu kambisile leswaku ku kula ka tindhawu ta vaaki ku khumbile njhani xiyimo xa ikhonomi na vaaki eka ndhawu naswona wu hlahlurile ku cinca ka xiyimo xa vutomi eMkhuhlu hi nkarhi, wu kongoma ngopfu eka nkarhi wa le ndzhaku ka xihlawuhlawu.

Ndzavisiso wu tirhise ndlela yo hlanganisa, wu hlanganisa tindlela ta qualitative na quantitative hi ku tirhisa swivutiso leswi nga na nhlamuselo yo karhi, magruphu ya ku angula, na vutivi lebyi humaka eka vanhu va nkoka, ku tirhisa data ya le hansi na ya le henhla. Data ya le hansi yi hundzuluxiwile, yi hleriwile eka Excel, kutani yi kambisile hi ku tirhisa Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Data ya Mkhuhlu yi kombisa ku hambana ka rimbewu eka ku tsaka ka vutomi: vavasati hi nkarhi hinkwawo va kombisa ku tsaka swinene, ku khorwiseka hi vutomi, na ntshembo hi nkarhi lowu taka ku tlula vavanuna. Ku tlula kwalaho, vaaki lava nga na dyondzo ya le henhla va tshama va ri na xiyimo xa vutomi lexi antswaka hi swiphiqo swintsongo swa

ikhonomi na vaaki. Hambiswiritano, data ya le kaya eMkhuhlu yi kombisa ku tlula ku tsandzeka ntsena, naswona yi kombisa ku hambana loku nga heriki ka ikhonomi na vaaki loku nga khumbaka ku tsaka ka vaaki hi ndlela yo kongoma.

Swiphiqo swa ikhonomi na vaaki leswi kumekeke eMkhuhlu swi nga lulamisiwa hi ku tirhisa Local Economic Development (LED) strategy na Industrial Park Revitalisation Programme hi masipala ku susumeta ku kula ka ikhonomi hi ku tumbuluxa ntirho na ku antswisa vutomi. LED strategy yi langutela ku antswisa xiyimo xa vutomi xa vaaki naswona yi lava ku tirhisana exikarhi ka Bushbuckridge Local Municipality na Hoxani Traditional Council office. Eka makumu, mindyangu ya ku tsetela yi fanele ku nghenisiwa ku hatlisisa nhluvuko eka tindhawu ta vaaki leti nga na matimba yo kula hi nkarhi lowu taka, hi nkarhi lowu ku nyikiwa ku seketela ka vaaki na ka makhombo eka tindhawu leti nga na matimba yo tsongo ya ku kula. Ku tlhela ku tsundzukiwa leswaku vaaki va simeka foramu ya bindzu ku langutisa ntirho wa mabhindzu. Foramu leyi yi nga lava mali yo pfuxeta mabhindzu ya Mkhuhlu hi ku tirhisa Industrial Development Corporation’s Industrial Park Revitalisation Programme, laha mali leyi languteriweke yi nga pfuna eka ku lulamisa swiphiqo swa ikhonomi na vaaki naswona yi ta pfuna ku ringanisela xiyimo xa vutomi xa vaaki.

Marito ya nkoka: ku andza ka tindhawu ta vaaki; xiyimo xa vutomi; mindzulamiso ya ikhonomi na vaaki; nhluvuko wa ikhonomi; ku pfuxetiwa ka mabhindzu

Ucwaningo Lwezindawo Zokuhlala eMkhuhlu

Isifinyezo (IsiZulu Abstract)

Uhulumeni wobandlululo waseNingizimu Afrika wasungula amazwe omdabu (homelands), okwaholela ezinhlelweni zokuhlala ezihlukile ezweni, kanti izindawo ezisemaphethelweni zaziyingxenye yaleyo mihlahlandlela yokuhlala. IMkhuhlu ihlukaniswa njengendawo yokuhlala enezinsiza ezilinganiselwe kakhulu futhi ichazwa njengendawo yasemakhaya ehlakazekile, etholakala ngaphakathi kwamazwe omdabu ngaphansi kobunikazi bomhlaba bendabuko. Ukwandiswa kwezindawo zokuhlala, izinga lempilo, kanye nezinselelo zenhlalo nezomnotho kuthinta ukunikezwa kwezinsiza futhi kunikela ekungabi nokuzinza kwezindawo zokuhlala zabantu. Umbuzo oyinhloko wocwaningo lolu bekunguthi: Ingabe kukhona ukuxhumana phakathi kokwandiswa kwezindawo zokuhlala, izinga lempilo, kanye nokuphatha kwendawo eMkhuhlu maqondana nezitayela zenhlalo nezomnotho kanye nokuvuselelwa kwezimboni?

Ukuze kuphendulwe lo mbuzo wocwaningo, ucwaningo luhlolisise ukuxhumana phakathi kokwandiswa kwezindawo zokuhlala, izinga lempilo, kanye nokuphatha kwendawo eMkhuhlu, kugcizelelwa umthelela wazo ezitayeleni zenhlalo nezomnotho kanye nemizamo yokuvuselela izimboni. Ukuze kufezwe lokhu, ucwaningo luhlaziye umlando kanye nesimo sezombusazwe saseMkhuhlu, lunikeza uhlaka lokuqonda izimo zamanje zokuhlala kanye nezakhiwo zokuphatha. Luhlolisise futhi ukuthi ukukhula kwezindawo zokuhlala kuthinte kanjani izimo zenhlalo nezomnotho endaweni futhi lwahlaziya uguquko lwezinga lempilo eMkhuhlu ngokuhamba kwesikhathi, lugxila ikakhulukazi esikhathini sangemuva kobandlululo.

Ucwaningo lusebenzise isu elihlanganisa izindlela zokucwaninga ezihlukahlukene, lihlanganisa izindlela zekhwalithethivu nezibalo ngokusebenzisa izingxoxo ezihleleke ngokwengxenye, amaqembu okugxila, kanye nemibono evela kubantu ababalulekile, kusetshenziswa idatha eyinhloko kanye nedatha yesibili. Idatha eyinhloko yaguqulwa yaba umbhalo, yahlelwa ku-Excel, yabe isihlaziywa kusetshenziswa i-Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) inguqulo 20. Idatha evela eMkhuhlu iveza umehluko omkhulu phakathi kobulili ekuthokozisweni kwempilo: abesifazane njalo baveza injabulo enkulu, ukwaneliseka ngempilo, kanye nethemba ngekusasa kunabesilisa. Ngaphezu kwalokho, izakhamuzi ezinemfundo ephakeme zivame ukuba

nezinga elingcono lempilo kanye nezinselelo ezimbalwa zenhlalo nezomnotho. Nokho, idatha yaseMkhuhlu ikhombisa okungaphezu kokunganeliseki, futhi iveza ukungalingani okuqhubekayo kwezenhlalo nezomnotho okuqondile okuphazamisa inhlalakahle yezakhamuzi.

Izinselelo zenhlalo nezomnotho ezikhonjwe eMkhuhlu zingaxazululwa ngokusebenzisa isu le-Local Economic Development (LED) kanye nohlelo lokuvuselela amapaki ezimboni oluqhutshwa ngumkhandlu kamasipala ukuze kuvuselelwe umnotho ngokudala imisebenzi nokuthuthukisa izindlela zokuphila. Isu le-LED lihlose ukuthuthukisa izinga lempilo yezakhamuzi futhi lifuna ukubambisana phakathi kweBushbuckridge Local Municipality kanye neHhovisi leHoxani Traditional Council. Ekuphetheni, izinhlelo zokutshala imali kufanele zethulwe ukuze kusheshiswe ukuthuthukiswa kwezindawo ezinamandla okukhula aphezulu kuyilapho kunikezwa ukwesekwa okuqhubekayo kwezenhlalo nezokuphatha ezindaweni ezinamandla okukhula aphansi. Kuphinde kunconywe ukuthi umphakathi usungule iforamu yebhizinisi ukuze iqaphe imisebenzi yezimboni. Le foramu ingafuna uxhaso lokuvuselela izimboni zaseMkhuhlu ngokusebenzisa uhlelo lwe-Industrial Development Corporation’s Industrial Park Revitalisation Programme, kanti imali elindelekile izosiza ekuxazululeni izinselelo zenhlalo nezomnotho kanye nokulinganisa izinga lempilo yezakhamuzi.

Amagama angukhiye: ukwandiswa kwezindawo zokuhlala; izinga lempilo; izitayela zenhlalo nezomnotho; ukuthuthukiswa komnotho; ukuvuselelwa kwezimboni

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List of Abbreviations

BLM	Bushbuckridge Local Municipality
HSP	Housing Sector Plan
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IPRP	Industrial Park Revitalisation Programme
LED	Local economic development
NDP	National Development Plan

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The apartheid regime established homelands, producing distinctive settlement patterns across South Africa. Among these were peripheral settlements, located along the borders between White towns and rural homelands. These areas were marked by informal development-unplanned housing and inadequate infrastructure-alongside limited formal initiatives such as basic service provision (Charlton, 2016). As a result, peripheral settlements often experienced stagnation, and those that initially flourished entered economic and social crisis at the end of apartheid (Smith, 1990). The apartheid system thus entrenched profound spatial divisions and inequalities that remain visible in both urban and rural contexts, shaping living conditions and socio-economic outcomes (Swanepoel, 2020).

As Evans (2009) notes, the creation of homelands was central to apartheid's philosophy of excluding Black South Africans from meaningful participation in the national economy. This exclusion profoundly influenced settlement geography and socio-economic trends, particularly in peripheral areas. The governance structures engineered under apartheid continue to affect development trajectories today, influencing settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic indicators such as employment, income, education, and demographic change in Mkhuhlu.

This study, therefore, asks:

- ***Is there a connection between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu, regarding socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation?***

Rapid settlement expansion in Mkhuhlu has reshaped residents' quality of life, driven by socio-economic forces including population growth, migration, and rising demand for services. However, the discontinuation of local industries has contributed to unemployment, poverty, and declining living standards. Similar challenges are evident across other peripheral settlements, where damaged infrastructure and insufficient

investment fail to meet modern economic demands. The absence of industrial revitalisation through local economic development (LED) strategies has exacerbated inequality and economic decline.

The significance of this study lies in exploring how settlement expansion can be balanced with improvements in quality of life, while aligning socio-economic trends with industrial revitalisation strategies that foster inclusive growth, reduce unemployment, and promote sustainable development.

Post-apartheid peripheral settlements continue to face challenges such as inadequate service provision and entrenched poverty (Swanepoel, 2020). While settlement expansion has improved living standards in some areas, inequalities remain deeply embedded in the post-apartheid landscape (Smith, 2023). South Africa is consistently ranked among the most unequal societies globally, with Black communities disproportionately affected by poverty (Badat, 2008; Francis & Webster, 2019). In Mkhuhlu, unemployment continues to rise due to weak economic policies, underscoring the need for radical social interventions to redress disparities between peripheral and urban areas.

Historically, the Tomlinson Commission (1955) emphasised the importance of industrial development in homelands as a prerequisite for “separate development.” Industrial zones established under apartheid sought to raise living standards and reduce social disadvantages (Horrell, 1973; Rikhotso, 1997; Marais et al., 2006; Sebokedi-Phetlhu, 2019). These initiatives initially uplifted communities such as Mkhuhlu, driving settlement expansion, migration, and socio-economic benefits. However, following the end of apartheid, industries declined, and government support diminished, leaving Mkhuhlu vulnerable to poverty and unemployment. Addressing these shortcomings remains critical for improving living standards and ensuring sustainable development (South African Cities Network, 2016).

1.2 Research Aim, Problem, and Objectives

Settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic challenges significantly affect service provision and contribute to unsustainable living conditions (South Africa Department of Environmental Affairs, 2011). Structural factors such as settlement size, density, and transport patterns pose persistent challenges for effective service

delivery. Settlements like Mkhuhlu emerged from socio-economic processes rooted in the Natives' Land Act of 1913, and their unplanned expansion has had direct consequences for residents' quality of life. Investigating these dynamics is essential to ensure that peripheral areas achieve social and economic vibrancy.

The classification of South African settlements reflects the enduring legacy of apartheid, with "townships" and "homelands" remaining prominent features of the spatial landscape. Mkhuhlu is characterised as a dispersed rural settlement with minimal service functions, under the authority of traditional leadership (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research [CSIR], 2008). Its socio-economic structure is largely dependent on rural livelihoods, social grants, and subsidies. While settlement expansion in Mkhuhlu has been driven by its ability to provide social and economic benefits typically associated with towns, sprawling rural growth has also produced negative outcomes, including unemployment, poverty, and social unrest (CSIR, 2008).

Against this backdrop, the central research question guiding this study is:

- ***Is there a connection between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu regarding socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation?***

To address this question, the study ***aims to explore the interrelationship between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu, with particular attention to their influence on socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation.***

The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the historical and political context of Mkhuhlu, providing a framework for understanding current settlement dynamics and governance structures.
2. To examine how settlement growth has influenced the socio-economic conditions in Mkhuhlu.
3. To analyse the transformation of the quality of life in Mkhuhlu over time, focusing specifically on the post-apartheid era.

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation comprises six chapters.

Chapter 1: General Introduction and Background

This chapter provides a general overview of the study. It introduces the research by reflecting on settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic trends in Mkhuhlu, while situating these issues within the broader context of homelands and related policies. The chapter also outlines the motivation for the study, the research aim, problem statement, and objectives. In addition, it explains the research approach and methodology adopted. Finally, the chapter presents the structure of the dissertation and the rationale underpinning the investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the study. It begins by delineating the historical and political context of Mkhuhlu, providing a foundation that links its past to present settlement dynamics and governance structures. The chapter then traces the growth of Mkhuhlu, examining how its expansion has both shaped and been shaped by local socio-economic conditions and policy frameworks.

In addition, the review analyses the transformation of quality of life in Mkhuhlu over time, with particular attention to the relationship between settlement expansion and governance. Special emphasis is placed on the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, highlighting how legacies of segregation continue to influence contemporary development. Finally, the chapter considers anticipated future socio-economic trends, situating Mkhuhlu within broader debates on peripheral settlement sustainability and industrial revitalisation.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a concise description of Mkhuhlu, the study site, and outlines the research methods and procedures employed in data collection and analysis. It presents an overview of the research design, detailing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and discusses the methodological limitations encountered during the study.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings from the study conducted in Mkhuhlu. It outlines the socio-economic background and demographic characteristics of the respondents, highlighting factors that influence perceptions of quality of life. The chapter also reports on the challenges affecting residents' well-being and examines settlement expansion patterns and changes over time. Together, these results provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics shaping Mkhuhlu's development.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter interprets and analyses the findings from Mkhuhlu, situating them within the broader historical, political, and socio-economic context. It examines how household characteristics and settlement dynamics influence residents' quality of life and explores the challenges that continue to shape socio-economic conditions in the township. The discussion also considers respondents' perspectives on the drivers of settlement expansion, linking these insights to theoretical frameworks and policy debates. In doing so, the chapter connects empirical results to wider academic and developmental discourse, highlighting implications for governance, industrial revitalisation, and sustainable growth in peripheral settlements.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter synthesises the findings of the study, presenting an overall summary, key conclusions, and practical recommendations. It consolidates insights on settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic trends in Mkhuhlu, highlighting their interconnectedness with local governance and industrial revitalisation. The conclusions draw together the study's objectives, while the recommendations provide actionable strategies for policymakers, local authorities, and community stakeholders to foster sustainable development and improve residents' well-being.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Settlements are established to accommodate communities in specific geographic areas (Woerner, 2022). They are typically classified as urban, rural, compact, or dispersed. Mkhuhlu is characterised as a rural settlement within the former Gazankulu homeland. In academic literature, settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic trends are consistently identified as key drivers of economic development (Cingano, 2014). Davids and Gaibie (2011) emphasise that settlement expansion in peripheral areas remains a critical factor influencing socio-economic outcomes, as seen in Mkhuhlu. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that Mkhuhlu evolves into a liveable settlement.

South Africa's post-apartheid government continues to confront the inequalities and racial segregation inherited from the homeland system. Mariotti and Fourie (2014) argue that this legacy continues to affect the quality of life in communities such as Mkhuhlu. Revitalising the Mkhuhlu industrial growth point is therefore crucial to supporting local livelihoods and improving living standards.

Peripheral settlements, where most low-income households reside, are often characterised by unemployment and inadequate infrastructure (Moyo & Machaba, 2021). These conditions fall short of Sustainable Development Goal 11, which calls for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable human settlements. The General Household Survey (Stats SA, 2017) revealed that more than two million people live in previously disadvantaged settlements, many of which lack adequate service provision. Turok (2015) highlights that peripheral settlements reflect the imbalances of apartheid-era planning, with poor access to services and economic opportunities. Yet, as Misselhorn (2008) notes, they also play a vital role in accommodating low-income households and offering affordable alternatives to urban living.

Rapid population growth and migration have accelerated settlement expansion in peripheral areas, particularly in developing countries. Xie et al. (2022) stress the importance of understanding these patterns for effective rural and small-town planning,

noting that Mkhuhlu's spatial form was shaped by Bantustan policies. Henderson and Wang (2007) similarly argue that Mkhuhlu is likely to continue expanding due to its capacity to respond to socio-economic pressures.

The decline of the Mkhuhlu growth point has negatively affected socio-economic trends and reduced residents' quality of life. To address these challenges, theoretical frameworks such as growth pole theory and core-periphery models provide useful lenses. Zietsman et al. (2006) highlight the value of settlement indicators in modelling growth potential, while Adell (1999) argues that growth pole theory can guide government investment in industries to stimulate local economic growth and improve quality of life. This approach emphasises the revitalisation of industries and the diffusion of development benefits to rural and peripheral areas.

However, Nakarada and Vidojević (2023a) caution that core-periphery models have produced limited results in both South Africa and Serbia, despite being applied in different contexts. Moreover, the post-apartheid government has rejected apartheid-era policies as illegitimate, complicating the adoption of certain frameworks. Nonetheless, these theories remain relevant for analysing settlement dynamics in both low-income and higher-income contexts.

2.2 Historical and Political Context of Mkhuhlu

The landscape of any settlement is shaped by its historical trajectory and prevailing socio-economic trends. Mkhuhlu was established under apartheid policies that created homelands, and its current form reflects this legacy. Formal segregation, institutionalised in 1948, profoundly influenced South Africa's development between 1948 and 1994. As Evans (2009) notes, apartheid entrenched racial segregation as a means of excluding Black South Africans from economic participation, with peripheral settlements bearing the brunt of these policies. Giliomee and Schlemmer (1990) similarly highlight that the apartheid government consolidated fragmented rural land into self-governing homelands, designed to provide political, economic, and cultural expression within a framework of separate development.

The racial division of settlement was a direct consequence of this vision. From the 1950s, townships for Black South Africans were created through relocations to urban peripheries, where mass housing schemes were established (Todes & Goodfellow,

2024). Mkhuhlu, incorporated into the Gazankulu homeland, was situated far from economic centres, requiring lengthy commutes to work. The Bantu Authorities Act (1951) and Bantu Resettlement Act (1954) formalised ten ethnic homelands, including Gazankulu, which shaped Mkhuhlu's socio-economic trajectory.

Industrial growth points such as Babelegi, Nkowankowa, Ekandustria, and Ngodini were established to stimulate homeland economies (Mariotti & Fourie, 2014). While these zones initially uplifted communities, their decline after 1994 left former homelands economically disadvantaged, with high poverty and unemployment rates (Evans, 2025). Thirty years into democracy, industries in Mkhuhlu and similar towns have become "urban blind spots," marked by disinvestment and infrastructural decay.

The legacy of homelands persists in settlement patterns and socio-economic disparities. Ali and Motala (2018) show that towns within the former Ciskei homeland still exhibit higher population densities than comparable towns outside the homeland system. Studies of urban peripheries reveal uneven outcomes: while northern eThekwini has grown into a hub of retail and logistics, Tshwane's eastern industrial periphery has suffered severe decline (Meth et al., 2016-2019). Rogerson and Rogerson (2023) note that apartheid-era economic planning shifted from industrial decentralisation to tourism and casino resort development, temporarily boosting revenue and employment.

Research on former homeland towns highlights recurring challenges: economic stagnation, factory closures, rising unemployment, and population growth (Nhlapo et al., 2011). Mogwase in the North West, for example, thrived between 1960 and 1990 due to industrial incentives, but post-1994 withdrawal of subsidies triggered retrenchments, feminisation of precarious labour, and factory closures (Phalatse, 2000).

In Mkhuhlu, the collapse of industries following the democratic transition undermined the local economy and worsened unemployment. The persistence of apartheid-era land policies continues to constrain development, with disputes over land allocation impeding socio-economic progress (University of the Witwatersrand, 2019). Traditional leadership, historically central to homeland governance, retains cultural authority but has seen its administrative powers reduced under municipal systems (Ainslie & Kepe, 2016; Rugege, 2003). While chiefs remain custodians of customary land (Magwede,

2023; Mawere et al., 2022), their role in municipal governance is contested, creating uncertainty in land administration.

Despite three decades of democracy, inequality remains entrenched. Turok (2014) argues that government efforts to redress apartheid disparities have been slow, requiring stronger systems to address unemployment and improve living standards. Transformation depends on collaboration among stakeholders, including traditional leaders, to dismantle apartheid-era structures (Graham & Berrisford, n.d.). Yet, as Chobokoane and Horn (2015) observe, policy gaps, weak enforcement, and inadequate engagement continue to hinder settlement expansion and socio-economic transformation.

South Africa's progressive legal framework, including Section 26 of the Constitution and the Housing Act 107 of 1999, seeks to guarantee housing rights and prioritise the needs of the poor (SERI, 2025). However, implementation challenges persist, leaving peripheral settlements such as Mkhuhlu struggling to achieve equitable development.

2.3 Settlement Growth in the Former Homelands and Their Influence on Economic Conditions and Policies

By 1990, Mkhuhlu's population was relatively small; however, by 2026 it had grown to approximately 75,000 residents, reflecting sustained demographic growth over three decades. This rapid expansion has placed significant pressure on social and economic transformation, service provision, and living standards. The settlement's growth mirrors broader patterns of rural residential expansion in former homeland areas (Xie et al., 2022). Yet, as Charlton (2016) observes, research on peripheral areas remains limited, particularly regarding settlement growth and socio-economic change. Nel (2001) notes that while economic development has received scholarly attention, settlement-specific dynamics require deeper investigation.

Economic growth in such contexts is often linked to LED strategies. Bushbuckridge Local Municipality's LED framework, embedded in its Integrated Development Plan (IDP), guides project implementation to meet community needs (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, 2021; Nkuna, 2016). UN-Habitat (2005) emphasises that LED practices must balance pro-poor and growth-oriented approaches, while Nel (2001) highlights

the value of pro-poor LED in integrating government and private sector efforts to redress historical disparities.

However, development in former homelands is complicated by tensions between political and administrative structures and traditional authorities (Nhlapho et al., 2011). Kwenda et al. (2020) found that unemployment rates in these areas remain disproportionately high, fuelling social exclusion, crime, and instability (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). Despite industrial decline, settlements such as Mkhuhlu continue to attract migrants, underscoring their perceived economic potential (Nhlapho et al., 2011).

Former homelands face persistent challenges, including geographic isolation, weak state policies, limited investment, political interference, and inadequate infrastructure funding (Nhlapho et al., 2011). These factors constrain spatial planning and economic growth. Marais et al. (2014) argue that industrial growth points in such towns struggle to revitalise infrastructure despite being envisioned as regional economic centres.

The growth pole theory offers a potential framework for revitalisation. Adell (1999) suggests that investing in industries can stimulate local economies and spread development benefits to rural areas. While homeland policies during apartheid were controversial, they demonstrated the capacity of industrial growth points to influence socio-economic trends. Similarly, core-periphery models highlight how apartheid-era planning deliberately deprived Black communities of quality of life (Mkhwanazi & Jili, 2024; Smit & Booysen, 1977). Tomlinson's rural industrial development scheme, drawing on the Lewis model, was instrumental in shaping Mkhuhlu's growth (Evans, 2019).

The post-apartheid transition introduced development opportunities but also created uncertainty regarding authority structures. Investors often remain unclear whether to engage municipalities or traditional leaders (King, 2004). Legislation such as the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (2003) sought to clarify roles, strengthening collaboration between traditional leaders and municipal councils (Du Plessis, 2023). Nevertheless, gaps in accountability and coordination continue to hinder effective planning.

Traditional leaders remain influential in cultural preservation and land administration (Rugege, 2003; Mawere et al., 2022; Magwede, 2023). Their involvement is critical for

addressing socio-economic challenges in Mkhuhlu. Yet, as Khunou (2009) notes, reliance on homeland industries historically sustained livelihoods, and their collapse has left communities vulnerable. Case studies of Qwaqwa and Botshabelo illustrate how post-apartheid withdrawal of subsidies led to job losses and declining living standards (Marais & Cloete, 2016). Similar struggles are evident in Mkhuhlu, where stakeholders face difficulties securing investment for industrial revitalisation.

Industrial zones in homelands once served as engines of rural development, driving settlement growth and migration. In Mkhuhlu, the Hoxani Tribal Authority's unplanned land allocations responded to population pressures but neglected service provision. Addressing these challenges requires external investment and stronger LED interventions (Rogerson, 2002). Yet, as Chobokoane and Horn (2015) argue, inadequate local policy frameworks and enforcement remain obstacles.

The National Development Plan (NDP) envisions eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030. Achieving this goal depends on collaboration among municipalities, traditional leaders, and external stakeholders. For Mkhuhlu, revitalising the industrial growth point is essential to improving the quality of life and ensuring sustainable socio-economic transformation.

2.4 Quality of Life, Settlement Expansion, and Anticipated Future Socio-Economic Trends of Mkhuhlu

There is a clear interconnection between quality of life, settlement expansion, and socio-economic activities. A settlement typically comprises residential, recreational, retail, governmental, entertainment, and industrial components. When well-planned, these elements collectively provide adequate services to residents, thereby reinforcing the link between settlement growth, quality of life, and socio-economic development.

Quality of life is generally characterised by indicators such as life satisfaction, happiness, and optimism (Møller, 2004). According to Andrews and McKennel (1980), individuals' perceptions of their quality of life are closely tied to life satisfaction, while happiness reflects an emotive interpretation of subjective well-being. Socio-economic status, in turn, is determined by factors such as education, income, and occupation, which influence both settlement dynamics and residents' lived experiences.

2.4.1 Quality-of-life measurements

Quality of life is a central theme in this study, particularly given South Africa's history of allocating opportunities and resources along racial lines. These imbalances must be rectified to overcome persistent inequalities (Davids & Gaibie, 2011). Richards et al. (2006) note that the Quality-of-Life Index is closely linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing a framework for assessing well-being in alignment with economic development priorities. Key indicators include health and well-being, education, economic stability, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. The index directly contributes to monitoring SDGs such as reducing inequalities (SDG 10), promoting good health (SDG 3), ensuring quality education (SDG 4), and fostering sustainable communities (SDG 11).

This study measures the quality of life of Mkhuhlu residents to identify interventions and services that can inform local policymakers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa's quality of life was assessed using WHO questionnaires, revealing declines in happiness, mental health, and economic stability (Greyling et al., 2020). Such assessments highlight dissatisfaction and guide service delivery improvements.

The South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS, 2008) found that Black African respondents were the unhappiest and most dissatisfied, yet the most optimistic about the future. White respondents, conversely, reported higher happiness and satisfaction but less optimism. These disparities reflect racial inequalities in living standards, with Mkhuhlu residents experiencing some of the lowest conditions compared to minority White communities.

The UNDP Human Development Report (2001) underscores that racial segregation remains traceable in former homelands, where development is a key measure of quality of life. Davids and Gaibie (2011) argue that South Africa's living standards remain uncertain because minority groups continue to control production resources, perpetuating injustices. Current government policies aim to close inequality gaps through strategies such as LED, particularly in peripheral areas.

Rural development is widely recognised as a tool for improving livelihoods, focusing on community-based initiatives (Maroo et al., 2015). Yet, despite progress, South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries globally, with rural residents in former homelands facing poor living conditions and limited development opportunities. Socio-

economic participation is critical for improving standards of living and reflects good governance. Møller et al. (1986) found that, across population groups, people's needs are fundamentally similar, but apartheid injustices left Black South Africans disproportionately disadvantaged.

Government interventions, such as the National School Nutrition Programme, have made progress in reducing poverty and safeguarding learners' well-being, benefiting over nine million pupils (South Africa, 2014). However, these efforts remain insufficient, with the OECD (2011) reporting that South Africa performs poorly on socio-economic dimensions of well-being compared to other countries.

Despite these challenges, Davids and Gaibie (2011) note that many South Africans remain hopeful about the future. Education emerges as a key determinant of happiness and satisfaction, as those with higher education levels report better access to services. Yet, frustration with poor service delivery persists (Hough, 2008), particularly among Black communities. Van Huyssteen and Botha (2008) emphasise that poverty in former homelands such as Thohoyandou, Ulundi, and Mmabatho remains deeply rooted in apartheid structures, with household incomes often below the poverty line.

Ultimately, settlements must be measured by their ability to sustain inhabitants and foster community development. A liveable settlement should provide basic needs, social benefits, and economic opportunities, ensuring improved quality of life for all residents.

2.4.2 The impact of settlement expansion and migration

The apartheid system entrenched racial segregation, forcing Black South Africans into townships near urban areas. These settlements were designed to house workers temporarily rather than provide permanent residences (Rikhotso, 1997). Spatial segregation excluded Black communities from economic development, leaving them in areas with poor living conditions and limited opportunities, while White communities enjoyed access to well-developed infrastructure and higher living standards.

Settlement expansion reflects changes in land cover driven by socio-economic needs. In Mkhuhlu, aerial imagery illustrates how residential zones have spread, reducing natural land cover. Similar patterns are observed globally: for example, Singkawang City in Indonesia experienced a 5.33% decline in farming areas between 2014 and

2015 due to population growth (Lisanyoto et al., 2019). Mkhuhlu's population grew from 20,548 in 2001 to an estimated 75,924 in 2026, with a 5.13% annual increase in the past year, underscoring the pressures of rapid expansion.

Settlement growth influences regional demographics, migration, and economic balance by increasing demand for basic services and resources. Comparative studies show that settlement expansion varies according to economic capacity. In Jiangsu Province, China, southern regions expanded more rapidly than northern ones due to stronger economic activity (Xu et al., 2014). In developing countries, rural settlements often grow due to population pressures, migration, and urbanisation (Xie et al., 2022). Spatial planning is therefore critical for guiding development patterns and ensuring sustainable growth.

Migration plays a central role in shaping settlement expansion. In KwaZulu-Natal, infrastructural development rather than employment alone has become a major driver of migration (Cross et al., 1989). Arnold et al. (2025) highlight that rural migration is often motivated by the pursuit of better living standards, improved economic conditions, and enhanced skills. Mkhuhlu's socio-economic potential has similarly attracted migrants, contributing to its expansion.

Former Bantustan areas such as Thohoyandou, Ulundi, and the Greater Sekhukhune district have experienced significant population growth despite weak infrastructure and governance capacity (Van Huyssteen & Botha, 2008). Migration trends show that peripheral areas perceived as economically viable continue to attract new residents, reinforcing the link between settlement expansion and socio-economic dynamics.

Globally, socio-spatial inequalities have revived concepts such as peripheralisation and marginalisation in spatial studies (Kühn, 2015). These processes highlight disparities between centralised and peripheral regions, shaped by economic polarisation, social inequality, and political power. The Global Report on Human Settlements (1987) emphasises that settlements drive social and economic integration, influenced by both government policies and societal acceptance of change.

Theories of development provide further insight. Tombari (2019) argues that empowerment requires both primary products (agriculture) and secondary products (industry) to sustain communities. Clark (1998) highlights industrialisation as a key driver of rural-to-urban migration in Europe and North America, while modernisation

theory emphasises technology as a catalyst for improving living standards (Peng et al., 2018). Applied to Mkhuhlu, theories offer a framework for addressing socio-economic challenges through technological and infrastructural investment.

Political and socio-economic changes have historically triggered migration and settlement expansion. Macagnano (2002) notes that apartheid-era industrial decentralisation policies supported peripheral areas, stimulating population growth and migration. Today, similar policies and targeted interventions are needed to accelerate socio-economic development and improve living standards in Mkhuhlu and other peripheral settlements.

2.4.3 Socio-economic background in Mkhuhlu

Socio-economic factors reflect the interaction between social and economic development within a community, and socio-economic development is typically assessed through indicators such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy, and employment (Niaz, 2021). These measures differentiate rural, urban, and peripheral areas by levels of income and economic activity. Historically, Mkhuhlu was a centre of economic growth under apartheid-era segregation policies, but its industrial growth point was discontinued after 1994 (Rikhotso, 1997).

Conrad et al. (2015) note that residents once enjoyed better living standards, but the collapse of industries triggered socio-economic decline. This decline was exacerbated by shifts in authority between traditional leaders and local government, creating tensions in decision-making (Karg et al., 2019; Kingwill, 2003; Kwenda et al., 2020). Conflicts between political and administrative structures and traditional authorities continue to hinder municipal development planning (Nhlapho et al., 2011). High unemployment rates in former homelands, including Mkhuhlu, fuel instability, crime, and social exclusion (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). Despite industrial collapse, Mkhuhlu still attracts migrants due to its perceived potential for livelihood improvement through LED strategies (Nhlapho et al., 2011).

Former homeland areas face persistent challenges: geographic isolation, inconsistent policies, weak investment, political interference, and inadequate infrastructure funding (Nhlapho et al., 2011). These factors prolong economic stagnation and undermine the quality of life. Marais et al. (2014) argue that industrial growth points in such towns remain underutilised, despite being envisioned as regional economic centres.

Revitalising these growth points could address basic needs and improve living standards.

The discontinuation of industries in Mkhuhlu reflects broader global patterns. Industrial decline in the American Rust Belt and Germany's Ruhr Valley similarly led to unemployment and socio-economic crises (Hospers, 2004; Collins, 2019). However, government intervention revitalised these regions, improving socio-economic conditions (Hospers, 2018). Mkhuhlu could benefit from similar interventions, with LED strategies and stakeholder engagement driving industrial revitalisation.

Reincorporating former homeland industrial growth points into municipal structures has proven difficult. Political leadership inconsistencies and lack of accountability have delayed revitalisation efforts (Nhlapho et al., 2011). Consequently, unemployment, poverty, and inequality have worsened in Mkhuhlu, undermining residents' quality of life (Turok, 2011). Political buy-in is therefore essential to ensure inclusive growth and strengthen the viability of industrial growth points.

Effective implementation of government policies and development tools could improve living standards in Mkhuhlu (Gumede, 2015). Yet, inconsistent laws and political interference have delayed progress. The government must accelerate policy implementation to align with current socio-economic needs and ensure generational sustainability. Collaboration among stakeholders, including municipalities, private institutions, and traditional authorities, is vital and local councillors play a key role in linking communities with development initiatives.

The revitalisation of the Mkhuhlu industrial park is central to addressing community needs. The Industrial Park Revitalisation Programme (IPRP) targets former homelands, townships, and rural areas, aiming to address socio-economic challenges in peripheral regions. Additionally, Mkhuhlu's Agri-hub provides opportunities for rural economic development by enabling local farmers to trade agricultural products. Emerging farmers have already signed trade agreements through the Agri-hub, empowering local suppliers and strengthening community livelihoods.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework serves as a roadmap for developing argumentation in this study, drawing on existing theories to contextualise settlement expansion, socio-economic trends, and quality of life in Mkhuhlu. The literature reviewed highlights the historical and political background of Mkhuhlu, its influence on local socio-economic conditions and policies, and the challenges posed by settlement growth. Particular attention is given to the role of socio-economic status in shaping living standards over time, with emphasis on the post-apartheid era and anticipated future trends.

Settlement growth in peripheral areas such as Mkhuhlu is influenced by socio-economic dynamics, rapid population growth, and migration. The discontinuation of the Mkhuhlu growth point, following shifts in government policy, reduced socio-economic activity and negatively impacted residents' quality of life. To better understand these persistent challenges, this study draws on the growth pole theory as its primary theoretical lens.

Growth pole theory has been widely applied to explain settlement expansion and regional development. Zietsman et al. (2006) demonstrated that settlement dynamics can be measured and structured into frameworks that trace anticipated growth. The theory is particularly relevant to Mkhuhlu, as it emphasises the role of industrial investment and revitalisation in stimulating socio-economic transformation and improving quality of life. By investing in industries or revitalising existing ones, growth pole theory provides a mechanism for addressing settlement expansion challenges and fostering inclusive development.

Thus, the theoretical framework adopted in this study underpins the research aim: to explore the interconnections between settlement expansion, socio-economic trends, and quality of life in Mkhuhlu. It situates the town's development trajectory within broader debates on peripheral settlement sustainability and industrial revitalisation, offering a structured lens through which to analyse both historical legacies and future opportunities.

2.5.1 Growth pole theory

As Adell (1999) explains, Perroux's growth pole theory contributes to regional economic development by emphasising the role of strategic industrial investment in

peripheral areas. The theory is grounded in the belief that good governance fosters economic growth and welfare by directing resources into industries that address both social and economic needs. Strengthening growth pole strategies provides a structured approach to regional development planning, ensuring that industries serve as catalysts for wider socio-economic transformation.

Like other economic growth theories, growth pole theory highlights how LED and regional development can be enhanced through the revitalisation of strategic economic zones. In the case of Mkhuhlu, the theory offers insight into both the decline of industries established under the Gazankulu Development Corporation and the potential for their revitalisation. It also sheds light on the role of LED in shaping Mkhuhlu's socio-economic trajectory and the changes in the business value chain that occur when industries expand or collapse (Thomas, 1975).

Applying growth pole theory to Mkhuhlu underscores its potential effectiveness in addressing industrial revitalisation. By linking the theory to LED strategies, regional economic development can be strengthened, unemployment reduced, and poverty alleviated. This framework situates Mkhuhlu's challenges within broader debates on peripheral settlement sustainability, while offering practical pathways for industrial renewal and improved quality of life.

2.5.2 The importance of growth pole theory

Growth pole theory played a central role in this study, with one of its key strengths being its ability to identify and stimulate potential investment areas. The theory guides planners to prioritise industries with high potential for generating income and social benefits, as exemplified by the former Mkhuhlu industrial hub. For instance, the development of a manufacturing hub can create direct employment opportunities within factories while simultaneously stimulating supporting sectors such as transport, retail, and services. This multiplier effect enhances LED and strengthens regional economies.

Another important feature of growth pole theory is its emphasis on industrial clustering, where related businesses co-locate to share resources, infrastructure, and knowledge. This clustering effect fosters innovation, accelerates productivity, and attracts further investment. Growth poles also tend to draw infrastructure development, which in turn boosts local socio-economic transformation.

When implemented effectively, growth pole strategies can reduce inequalities by stimulating growth in strategic locations and addressing socio-economic challenges. However, inconsistent planning and poor governance can undermine these benefits. As Parr (1999) cautions, growth pole strategies may inadvertently deepen disparities if economic development is concentrated in already thriving regions, leaving peripheral areas further behind.

2.6 Conclusion

This study was guided by growth pole theory, which provided a framework for explaining the interaction between settlement expansion, quality of life, and economic development in former homeland areas such as Mkhuhlu. The theory has proven effective in addressing challenges in peripheral regions and continues to play a significant role in developmental strategies in both affluent and developing countries (Rikhotso, 1997).

Growth pole theory has been particularly influential in tackling socio-economic disparities in poor peripheral regions. By emphasising the stimulating role of industries and strategic locations, the theory offers pathways to eradicate inequality and improve living standards. It remains a powerful tool for understanding and shaping economic landscapes, as it integrates industrial revitalisation with broader socio-economic transformation.

For policymakers, growth pole theory provides a roadmap for designing strategies that not only boost economic output but also promote inclusive and sustainable development. In the case of Mkhuhlu, the framework highlights the importance of revitalising industrial hubs to stimulate LED, create employment opportunities, and enhance residents' quality of life.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study area where the research was conducted, including its background, geographic location (supported by a map), demographic profile, socio-economic trends, and key developmental issues. It further outlines the research methods applied and the design followed to achieve the study's aim and objectives introduced in Chapter One.

The chapter also describes the population from which the sample was drawn, the sampling techniques employed, and the nature of the data collected. It explains the instruments used for data collection and the procedures followed in analysing and interpreting the data. Finally, the chapter addresses the ethical considerations observed during the study. As Manti and Licari (2018) emphasise, informed consent is a prerequisite in all research fields, ensuring that participants voluntarily provide information and that their rights are safeguarded throughout the process.

3.2 Study Area

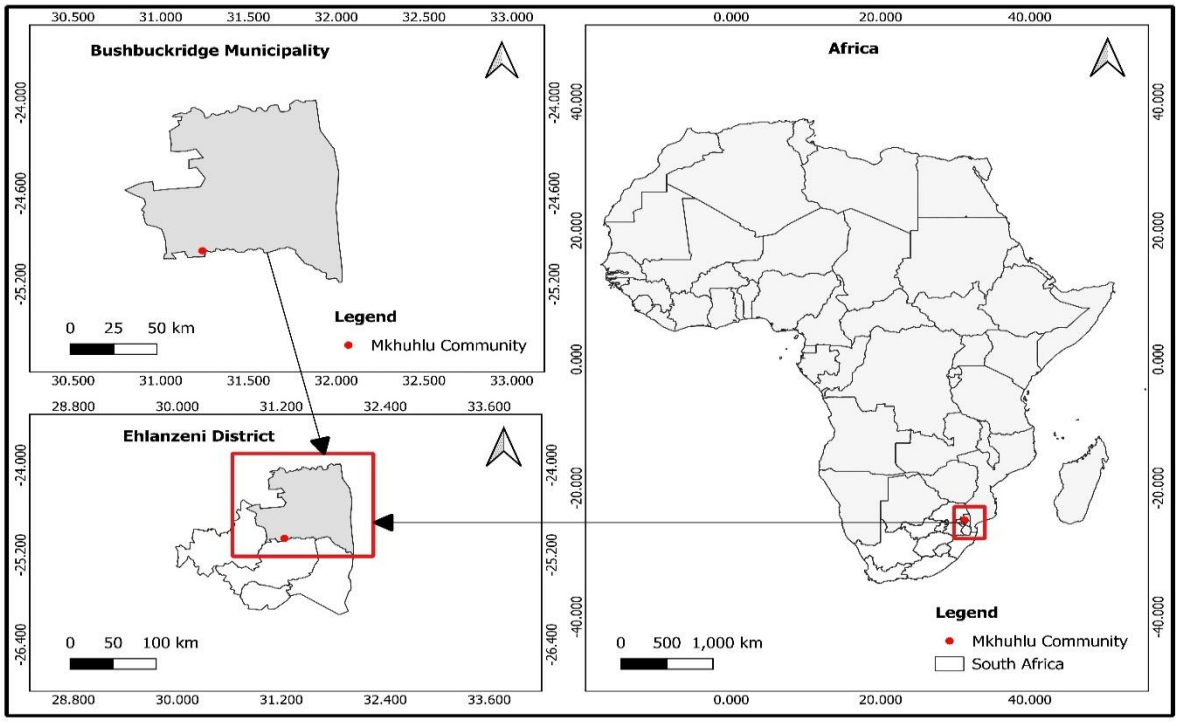

Figure 3.1: Study area map

Mkhuhlu was established under the Gazankulu homeland, occupied predominantly by the Tsonga/Shangaan people, and administered by a territorial legislative assembly from 1962 (Bureau for Economic Research re Bantu Development, 1976). In 1973, Gazankulu was declared independent (Malan & Hattingh, 1975). To address socio-economic challenges faced by Black communities, the apartheid government created the Gazankulu Development Corporation, which established the Mkhuhlu Industrial Park as part of its development strategy. This industrial hub attracted migrants seeking employment, contributing to population growth. Mouton (1992) reported that Gazankulu's population rose from 490,000 in 1980 to 717,000 in 1990, while Mthiyane et al. (2022) found that migration to peripheral areas continues to be driven by access to services and opportunities.

The research was conducted in Mkhuhlu township, located within Bushbuckridge Local Municipality in Mpumalanga province, South Africa. The settlement lies on the banks of the Sabie River under the jurisdiction of the Hoxani Tribal Authority. In 1978, Mkhuhlu was formally identified as an industrial growth point under the Gazankulu government. By 2001, the population stood at 20,548 (Stats SA, 2001), rising to 35,864

in 2011 across 8,379 households within an area of 21.55 km^2 (Frith, 2011). Current estimates place Mkhuhlu's 2026 population at approximately 75,924, with 21,000-22,000 households (World Population Review, 2026).

Employment in Mkhuhlu is concentrated in public services, tourism, agriculture, and trade, while 99% of manufacturing and industrial activities have ceased in the industrial area. One notable exception is Knittex, a factory established during apartheid that remains operational today, employing around 720 people. Most other facilities in the industrial zone have been repurposed for informal businesses, reflecting both resilience and adaptation in the local economy.



Figure 3.2: Aerial view of Mkhuhlu and the industrial area

Mkhuhlu can be described as a rural settlement that has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades. It ranks second among the 12 villages in Bushbuckridge Local Municipality that have experienced notable population growth due to migration since 2001 (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, 2017). According to Stats SA (2011), Mkhuhlu has the largest population in the municipality, supported by a basic range of social, health, and educational facilities.

The settlement is gradually transforming into a burgeoning small town, serving the southeastern communities of Bushbuckridge. This transformation is largely attributable to the emergence of retail establishments, particularly the Mkhuhlu Plaza shopping centre, located less than one kilometre from the township (Mafuwane et al., 2023). The

broader Mkhuhlu region has also attracted new residents, with local government initiatives aiming to integrate the Maluvana region into a formal township designation.

Historically, Mkhuhlu represented a hybrid of urban and rural settings. Its settlement expansion has been driven by employment opportunities, improved services, and its proximity to Hazyview, approximately 15 km away. Figure 3.2 provides an overview of Mkhuhlu and the Mkhuhlu Industrial Point, which remains a critical site for potential revitalisation.

3.3 Research Approach and Design

Saunders et al. (2016, p. 163) define research design as the plan that provides guidelines for answering research questions. Bryman (2016, p. 50) distinguishes five types of research design: experimental, cross-sectional (survey), longitudinal, case study, and comparative. Research design thus serves as a roadmap for capturing, assessing, interpreting, and presenting data to address the research problem (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

This study aimed to investigate the interplay between settlement expansion, quality-of-life transitions, and local governance in Mkhuhlu, assessing how these interconnected factors have shaped socio-economic trends and influenced industrial revitalisation efforts. To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining the strengths of quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews.

The mixed-methods design facilitated a comprehensive understanding of Mkhuhlu's development by integrating numerical data with lived experiences. Quantitative surveys measured household-level patterns, while qualitative interviews and focus group discussions provided deeper insights into community perceptions and governance dynamics (Wasti et al., 2022). This approach was particularly effective in capturing both statistical trends and contextual narratives, thereby addressing the research problem holistically.

- **Quantitative component**

A cross-sectional household survey was conducted using semi-structured questionnaires administered to randomly sampled heads of households. This method

provided measurable data on settlement expansion, socio-economic conditions, and quality-of-life indicators.

- **Qualitative component**

In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 key informants to elaborate on factors influencing socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation. Diversity among informants was prioritised to avoid bias, with participants including five Bushbuckridge Local Municipality officials, five Hoxani Traditional Council representatives, and five community leaders (Pahwa et al., 2023). Focus group discussions further enriched the qualitative data, capturing collective perspectives on settlement expansion and governance challenges.

- **Sequential explanatory design**

The study employed a sequential explanatory design, where qualitative data collection followed quantitative analysis to validate and contextualise findings (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Martin, 2011). This design has proven effective in similar studies, such as Bolarinwa and Boikhutso (2022), who investigated inequalities in KwaZulu-Natal settlements using surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

- **Comparative case studies**

The methodology aligns with approaches used in other South African contexts. For example, Mathebula (2021) applied mixed methods to study upgrading dynamics in Soshanguve Extension 3, while Zizzamia (2018) used household surveys and focus groups to explore socio-economic trends in Khayelitsha. Internationally, Dunning et al. (2008) employed mixed methods to assess quality-of-life satisfaction in Saskatoon, Canada. These comparative studies reinforce the validity of the chosen design for investigating settlement expansion and socio-economic transformation in Mkhuhlu.

3.3.1 Qualitative approach

As Baxter and Jack (2008) note, qualitative research is key in evaluating information relevant to a study, as it enables the exploration of diverse topics using multiple sources of data. Creswell (2013) further explains that qualitative approaches provide deeper insights into research subjects by fostering collaboration between researchers and participants. This interaction is critical, as it allows participants to freely express

authentic views while enabling researchers to better understand and interpret those perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Qualitative methods have proven effective in South African contexts. For example, Ngwenya et al. (2012) used qualitative research to explore the socio-economic impacts of youth in Zandspruit, demonstrating its value in capturing perceptions and lived experiences. Through inductive reasoning, qualitative research generalises meaningful insights from observed contexts (Yin, 2003). Data collection typically involves semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and focus group discussions, which allow participants to articulate their experiences and observations (DeFranzo, 2011). This collaborative process ensures that findings are grounded in personal narratives, enhancing validity and reliability (Marvasti, 2004; Ritchie et al., 2013; Younus, 2014).

Content analysis is a widely used method for interpreting qualitative data, particularly interviews and focus group discussions. It enables researchers to organise textual data into themes and patterns. In this study, content analysis was employed to interpret census data, policy documents, and local narratives, focusing on Mkhuhlu's population growth, household dynamics, and industrial decline within broader socio-economic processes. This method provided a deeper understanding of Mkhuhlu's transformation by moving beyond quantitative census figures to incorporate narratives, policies, and community accounts.

The findings highlight Mkhuhlu as an exemplar of urban periphery development challenges in post-apartheid South Africa, where industrial decline and demographic expansion intersect with socio-economic restructuring (Statistics South Africa, 2022). By combining qualitative inquiry with content analysis, the study captured both the structural and experiential dimensions of settlement expansion and socio-economic change.

3.3.2 Quantitative approach

In a quantitative approach, the relationship between variables is measured using structured instruments, statistical analysis, and systematic interpretation (Creswell, 2013). Hameed (2020) confirms that the use of variables in quantitative methods has proven effective in social studies, enabling researchers to examine relationships and test hypotheses. Creswell (2014) further explains that statistical procedures are central

to quantitative research, as they allow for the measurement of variables and the analysis of numerical data. This approach focuses on quantities and numerical forms to generate precise conclusions (UNDP, 2012).

In this study, participants' responses regarding settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic trends were captured using quantitative methods. This approach provided structured insights into social and economic challenges faced by Mkhuhlu residents. Yin (2009, p. 23) notes that quantitative research can also be applied within case study designs to investigate developments and challenges in specific areas, making it particularly relevant for peripheral towns such as Mkhuhlu.

Quantitative research relies on structured data collection techniques, including paper surveys, face-to-face structured interviews with closed-ended questions, and systematic observations (Creswell, 2013; DeFranzo, 2011). These methods were employed to address the study's objectives, ensuring consistency and reliability in data collection. Compared to qualitative methods, quantitative approaches provide greater structure, enabling researchers to generalise findings across larger populations (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, the quantitative approach was applied to measure settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic trends in Mkhuhlu. The structured interaction between the researcher and participants facilitated a common understanding of the research phenomenon, contributing to a holistic analysis of the issues under investigation. As Abawi (2008) highlights, such interaction enables researchers to identify and articulate community challenges, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings.

3.4 Sampling

Stratified sampling is a technique that ensures subgroups within a population are adequately represented. Researchers divide the population into strata based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, location, and socio-economic status, with each participant belonging to a stratum (Hayes, 2023). In this study, stratified random sampling was employed to group the identified population into strata, enabling the researcher to capture differences between demographic groups in Mkhuhlu. This method was particularly beneficial for exploring socio-economic trends, as it allowed

for a more nuanced understanding of population dynamics compared to simple random sampling, which treats all participants equally (Hayes, 2023).

Structured interviews were conducted to understand socio-economic trends in Mkhuhlu, while quantitative questionnaires captured settlement expansion and the socio-economic profile of the study area. Surveys were used to identify quality-of-life indicators, complemented by spatial analysis tools.

- Spatial Data Sources.
- 2023 aerial imagery: Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri), Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community.
- 2008 and 2017 aerial imagery: Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM).
- Settlement data: Department of Water Affairs.
- Road data: Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport.
- School data: Department of Education.
- Municipal boundary data: Municipal Demarcation Board.

All spatial data were projected using Hartebeeshoek Lo31 to ensure accurate mapping. Aerial images from 2008, 2017, and 2023 were sampled to detect settlement expansion trends in Mkhuhlu.

3.4.1 Sample characteristics

The sample included residents aged 18 years and older, stratified by age, gender, and education status:

- Age distribution: youth, adults, and pensioners.
- Gender: more male than female respondents.
- Education status:
    - No formal education, secondary, and tertiary levels: more female than male respondents.
    - Primary education: equal distribution between male and female respondents.

This stratified approach ensured that diverse demographic and socio-economic perspectives were incorporated into the study, strengthening the reliability and representativeness of the findings.

3.4.2 Sample size

Sample size is a fundamental component of a study, as it directly influences the validity and reliability of study findings. In survey-based research, the total population size of a study area is used to determine the appropriate sample size (Singh & Masuku, 2014). While sampling techniques are highly effective in addressing social science issues, an inappropriate sample size may lead to weak or misleading results. It is therefore critical to select participants carefully to ensure that the data collected adequately represents the population under study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

In this study, the population of Mkhuhlu was sampled using stratified random sampling. Respondents were grouped into strata based on demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and only residents of Mkhuhlu aged 18 years and older were eligible to participate. This method ensured that differences between groups were captured, while also allowing the researcher to generalise findings across the broader population (Singh & Masuku, 2014).

According to (2011), Mkhuhlu had 8,379 households. Using Raosoft's sample size estimation formula, the required sample size was calculated at a ±5% precision level, a 95% confidence level, and a 10% sampling intensity. This produced a required sample of 137 households. However, 37 questionnaires were incomplete or incorrectly captured and were excluded from the analysis, leaving 100 valid household responses for the final dataset.

The formula below was used to determine the sample size.

$$X = Z(c/100)^2 r(100-r)$$

$$N = Nx/((N-1)E^2 + x)$$

$$E = \text{Sqrt}\left[(N-n)x/n(N-1)\right]$$

Where N is the population size, r is the fraction of responses that you are interested in, and Z(c/100) is the critical value for the confidence level c, E is the desired margin of error. This formula ensured that the sample size was statistically valid and representative of Mkhuhlu's population, thereby strengthening the reliability of the study's findings on settlement expansion, socio-economic trends, and quality of life.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Household survey

As Gill et al. (2014) explain, household surveys typically comprise a list of questions administered to household representatives. In this study, questions were asked verbally using a **semi-structured questionnaire** (Appendix A). Semi-structured questionnaires allow participants to engage in open-ended discussion, enabling the researcher to acquire more detailed information compared to structured questionnaires. Busetto et al. (2020) describe semi-structured surveys as tools consisting of prearranged questions aligned with the study's objectives, while still allowing flexibility in responses.

A **Likert scale** was incorporated to measure respondents' willingness to agree or disagree with specific statements. This scale is particularly useful in capturing attitudes without pressuring participants to provide definitive answers (McLeod, 2023). Data collection occurred between September 2022 and December 2022 in Mkhuhlu. Approximately 137 households were interviewed, and the household questionnaire was structured into 4 sections:

- Biographic information
- Quality of life
- Socio-economic trends
- Impact of settlement expansion

This design ensured that both demographic characteristics and socio-economic perceptions were captured, providing comprehensive insights into settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic dynamics in Mkhuhlu.

3.5.2 Focus group discussion

The focus group method is a reliable and cost-effective tool for collecting qualitative data. It enables researchers to group participants in a particular area, thereby reducing costs while fostering interactive discussions. Focus groups allow participants to express attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and motivations, which can then be synthesised to draw meaningful conclusions. In this study, participants were community members,

with each group comprising 10 individuals. A total of 100 participants were engaged across 10 sessions.

The focus group discussions explored participants' perspectives on settlement expansion, quality of life, socio-economic trends, and anticipated industrial revitalisation. They also provided historical insights and behavioural information relevant to the study (Busetto et al., 2020; Sutton & Austin, 2015). This method offered participants a platform to disclose in-depth accounts of living conditions in Mkhuhlu (see Appendix B for the questionnaire used).

Socio-economic challenges were identified through qualitative interview questions and survey feedback. Following the household survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into settlement expansion, socio-economic trends, and governance issues. Interviews were conducted in both English and the local language, with translations recorded to ensure accuracy. As Valentine (1997) affirms, semi-structured interviews are effective in producing nuanced understandings of participants' perspectives and lived experiences.

The discussions were held in accessible, neutral public venues that were safe and reliable. The choice of venue positively influenced outcomes, as participants felt free to engage openly about the relevance of the study to their daily lives and its potential benefits for addressing socio-economic needs (Suh, 2002). Participants provided information on living standards, current challenges, and alternative options for decision-making (Rolfe et al., 2004).

Focus groups also served as a tool to test the draft questionnaire, verifying whether the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with participants' socio-economic challenges. This process ensured that the survey instrument was appropriately designed to capture the realities of Mkhuhlu residents (Suh, 2002).

3.5.3 Key-informant interviews

Kibuacha (2024) describes **key-informant interviews** as an essential tool in a researcher's toolkit, providing detailed insights into complex issues that can inform policy and guide effective solutions. In this study, key-informant interviews proved highly valuable for gathering in-depth information about Mkhuhlu's governance, service delivery, living standards, and demographic changes.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted to ensure direct engagement and to capture nuanced perspectives. Key informants were selected based on their knowledge of Mkhuhlu's socio-economic trends and their involvement in industrial revitalisation efforts. The interviewees included:

- Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM) ward councillors
- Hoxani Tribal Authority Indunas
- Local community leaders
- Ward committee members

These stakeholders provided diverse perspectives, ensuring that the study captured both institutional and community-level insights. Their contributions were critical in understanding the socio-economic challenges facing Mkhuhlu and in identifying strategies for industrial revitalisation and improved service delivery.

3.5.4 Pre-testing

Pre-testing is a critical step in research design, as it allows the researcher to identify gaps in the questionnaire and assess the community's willingness to participate in providing information. It also ensures that issues which could compromise the validity of the study are detected early. As Arain et al. (2010) note, time is an important factor in research, being closely associated with costs and the availability of participants.

In this study, the pre-testing of the questionnaire was conducted in Mkhuhlu to evaluate the readiness of the community to provide information and to identify weaknesses that could potentially lead to research failure. Simon (2011) emphasises that pre-testing strengthens the reliability of data collection instruments by ensuring that questions are clear, relevant, and aligned with the study objectives.

3.6 Data Analysis

As Kumar (1999) notes, research relies on both primary and secondary data. In this study, primary data were collected through surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews with sampled residents of Mkhuhlu, municipal officials, Hoxani traditional leaders, and community representatives. Secondary data sources included government legislation and publications, newspapers, archival records, websites, academic books, and peer-reviewed journals.

Primary data were transcribed and captured into Excel worksheets before being transferred to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program, which is widely used in social research for handling large datasets and conducting descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (Morgan, 2011). In this study, survey data were entered into SPSS v20, and descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were generated from demographic variables and perceived quality of life. Cross-tabulations were used to explore relationships between demographic characteristics and living standard indicators.

Binary logistic regression analysis was applied to examine the influence of socio-demographic variables on quality of life. Independent variables included gender (male = 1, female = 0), education level (no education = 1, primary = 2, secondary = 3, tertiary = 4), household size (1-5 = 1, 6-10 = 2, >10 = 3), and earned income (yes = 1, no = 2). The dependent variable was quality of life (satisfied = 1, not satisfied = 2). The Hosmer and Lemeshow test were used to assess the goodness-of-fit of the model and respondents' perceptions of socio-economic drivers (Salkind, 2011).

Qualitative data from focus group discussions and key-informant interviews were analysed using content and thematic analysis. Discussions were audio-recorded, supported by memos, and later transcribed into Word documents. Coding was applied to identify themes and patterns in participants' statements, which were then used to explain settlement expansion, quality of life, and socio-economic trends in Mkhuhlu (Rabiee, 2004; Tümen-Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). This thematic approach provided deeper insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and the impact of local governance on household livelihoods (Silverman, 2001).

By integrating descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and thematic content analysis, the study produced a comprehensive understanding of Mkhuhlu's socio-economic transformation, settlement expansion, and industrial decline.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In line with established ethical guidelines, this study adhered to standards designed to uphold research integrity, safeguard participants, and ensure the credibility of findings (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). Compliance was prioritised to guarantee that ethical

principles were applied in accordance with the codes and practices of the University of South Africa.

The research complied fully with institutional requirements, including the stipulation that ethical approval be obtained for studies involving human participants. The researcher submitted an application supported by documentation such as consent forms from the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality and the Hoxani Traditional Council. Approval was subsequently granted by the University's ethics committee, with reference number: 2022/CAES_HREC/045 (Appendix C).

This process ensured that participants' rights were respected, informed consent was obtained, and the study was conducted in a manner consistent with ethical research practice.

3.8 Methodological Limitations

During the course of this study, several barriers were encountered that affected the research process. A primary challenge was the lack of financial support, which limited the researcher's ability to meet the targeted sample size. Financial constraints also influenced logistical arrangements, including transportation and access to certain sections of the settlement.

Another barrier involved participant engagement. Some community members were reluctant to participate, either due to scepticism about disclosing their socio-economic status or because of misinformation circulating about the research objectives. This created tension in certain areas and required additional effort to build trust and clarify the purpose of the study.

Accessibility also posed difficulties. The researcher and assistants had to walk long distances to reach different sections of the settlement, which was time-consuming and physically demanding. Despite these challenges, data collection was completed, though the limitations inevitably influenced the scope and depth of the findings.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarises the research methodology adopted in the study, the background of the study area, and the socio-economic profile of Mkhuhlu. It outlines

how sample sizes were determined and describes the methods and approaches used to collect data. A detailed account of the statistical analysis techniques employed to process the data is also presented.

Data collection was guided by the research questions and objectives. During fieldwork, information was carefully recorded and securely stored to preserve its integrity for future use (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The study employed semi-structured interviews, household surveys, and focus group discussions, complemented by secondary sources such as journals and academic articles.

The chapter further highlights adherence to ethical considerations, ensuring compliance with institutional requirements and protecting participants' rights. Together, these methodological choices provided a robust framework for investigating settlement expansion, socio-economic trends, and quality-of-life dynamics in Mkhuhlu.

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CHAPTER 4:
RESULTS

Chapter 4 presents detailed results on the history and political context of Mkhuhlu, examining both past developments and current dynamics. It also provides respondents' biographic and socio-economic information, summarises factors influencing satisfaction with quality of life, and highlights the challenges affecting living conditions. Finally, the chapter discusses respondents' views on the drivers of settlement expansion and documents changes in Mkhuhlu over time.

Mkhuhlu possesses a relatively well-developed social infrastructure, with educational facilities and basic municipal services distributed across the settlement. However, service delivery challenges persist. Geographically, Mkhuhlu is located on the southern boundary of the municipality and adjacent to the railway line that bisects the municipality from south to north. This railway corridor, constructed under the previous government, was intended to stimulate economic growth. Yet, both the railway facilities and the Mkhuhlu growth point industries have been neglected, undermining their original purpose of boosting the local economy. Consequently, residents' living conditions are compromised, exacerbating social and economic imbalances, despite Mkhuhlu's designation as a strategic location for service provision.

Currently, plans are underway to revitalise the Mkhuhlu Industrial Park in alignment with national economic strategies such as the NDP and the Industrial Policy Action Plan. Both policies emphasise the importance of increasing the participation of small and medium-scale industries, particularly in peripheral settlements. Historically, the Mkhuhlu Industrial Park provided employment opportunities and supported LED before its decline. Its revitalisation holds significant potential to once again serve the community and surrounding areas.

The findings presented in this chapter address the central research question: ***Is there a connection between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu regarding socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation?*** Results also respond to Research Objective 2: *To examine how settlement growth has influenced the social and economic conditions in Mkhuhlu.* Respondents' biographic

and socio-economic profiles are analysed, factors influencing quality-of-life satisfaction are summarised, and challenges impacting living standards are discussed. Finally, the chapter presents results on the reasons facilitating settlement expansion and documents settlement change in Mkhuhlu over time.

4.1 Biographic and Socio-Economic Information

Table 4.1 summarises the biographic and socio-economic characteristics of participants in the study. Mkhuhlu continues to experience high levels of inequality and faces serious challenges related to unemployment, settlement expansion, quality of life, and service delivery (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, 2021).

The age distribution shows that among youth (<35 years), 56.7% were male and 43.3% female. In the 36-45 age group, 46.9% were male and 53.1% female. Among respondents aged 46-55 years, 60% were male and 40% female, while in the >56 years group, 61.5% were male and 38.5% female. Overall, more males participated in the study than females.

Household size data reveal that in households with 1-5 members, 64.0% were male and 36.0% female. In households with 6-10 members, 52.6% were male and 47.4% female, while households with more than 10 members had equal representation (50.0% male and 50.0% female).

Education levels also varied. Among respondents with no formal education, 57.7% were male and 42.3% female. At the primary education level, representation was equal (50.0% male and 50.0% female). At the secondary level, 52.9% were male and 47.1% female, while at the tertiary level, 56.7% were male and 43.3% female.

Income and employment data show disparities. Of those earning an income, 62.5% were male and 37.5% female, while among those with no income, representation was equal. Employment was dominated by males (65.0%), with females accounting for 35.0%. Social grants were a major source of income for females (75.0%), while earned income was dominated by males (65.0%).

Length of residence also varied: among those living in Mkhuhlu for 0–5 years, 30.0% were male and 70.0% female. For 6–10 years, 35.0% were male and 65.0% female.

For 11–15 years, 20.0% were male and 80.0% female. For 16–20 years, 15.0% were male and 85.0% female. For more than 20 years, 25.0% were male and 75.0% female.

Table 4.1: Respondents' characteristics

Category	Male (%)	Female (%)
Age:		
<35 years	56.7	43.3
36–45 years	46.9	53.3
46–55 years	60.0	40.0
>56 years	61.5	38.5
Gender	55.0	45.0
Household size:		
1–5	64.0	36.0
6–10	52.6	47.4
≥10	50.0	50.0
Education:		
No formal education	57.7	42.3
Primary education	50.0	50.0
Secondary education	52.9	47.1
Tertiary education	56.7	43.3
Income:		
Earning an income	62.5	37.5
No income	50.0	50.0
Income <R500	51.6	48.4
Income R500–R1000	0.0	100.0
Income R1001–R2500	66.7	33.3
Income >R2500	64.0	36.0
Employment:		
Employed	65.0	35.0
Source of income:		
Social grant	25.0	75.0
Earned income	65.0	35.0
Period of stay:		
0 – 5 years	30.0	70.0
6 – 10 years	35.0	65.0
11 – 15 years	20.0	80.0
16 – 20 years	15.0	85.0
+ 20 years	25.0	75.0

4.2 Factors Influencing Satisfaction with the Quality of Life in Mkhuhlu

Table 4.2 summarises respondents' satisfaction with their quality of life in relation to gender, age, household size, education level, and earned income. The analysis indicates that gender and age are the most significant predictors of satisfaction.

The odds ratio for gender shows that female residents of Mkhuhlu are 3.503 times more likely to be satisfied with their quality of life compared to male residents. Age also influences satisfaction, with a coefficient of 0.298, suggesting that as residents grow older, the probability of satisfaction increases by 1.347. However, this effect is not statistically significant (p = 0.335).

Household size, education level, and earned income exert smaller impacts on quality-of-life satisfaction, reflecting the complexity of socio-economic conditions in Mkhuhlu. Qualitative findings further revealed that female-headed households were often unemployed and reliant on social grants, while elderly respondents reported using their grants to sustain families where employment was scarce.

Key-informant interviews highlighted differences in satisfaction levels across leadership groups. Municipal officials, such as councillors, expressed higher satisfaction with the quality of life compared to traditional leaders (Indunas) and community leaders (e.g., pastors), who reported greater dissatisfaction with socio-economic trends.

Table 4.2: Factors influencing satisfaction with the quality of life in Mkhuhlu

Category	B	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Gender	1.254	1	.045	3.503	1.027	11.947
Age	.298	1	.335	1.347	.735	2.467
Household size	-.246	1	.595	.782	.317	1.933
Education level	-.310	1	.175	.734	.469	1.148
Earned income (No)	-.604	1	.294	.547	.177	1.687
Constant	-.764	1	.615	.466		

Satisfaction with quality of life = Gender + Age + Household Size + Education Level + Earned Income

4.3 Challenges Affecting the Quality of Life in Mkhuhlu Township

Figure 4.1 graphically summarises the challenges affecting residents' quality of life in Mkhuhlu, as identified by respondents. The most pressing issues include crime, poor service delivery, unemployment, inadequate road maintenance, water shortages, limited health services, poverty, population growth, corruption, and the non-revitalisation of local industries. The data revealed that 44% of respondents identified crime as the primary factor undermining the quality of life. Poor service delivery was cited by 17%, while 5% mentioned water shortages and 2% highlighted poor road maintenance, noting that roads are often repaired only during funerals. Unemployment was reported by 10% of respondents, with many emphasising the financial burden of job-seeking. Poverty (7%), inadequate health services (4%), population growth (5%), lack of a tertiary college (3%), and corruption (3%) were also identified as significant challenges. These findings were corroborated by key-informant interviews, where traditional council leaders, community representatives, and municipal officials consistently pointed to crime, poor service delivery, unemployment, poverty, population growth, and the stalled revitalisation of Mkhuhlu industries as persistent barriers to improved living standards.

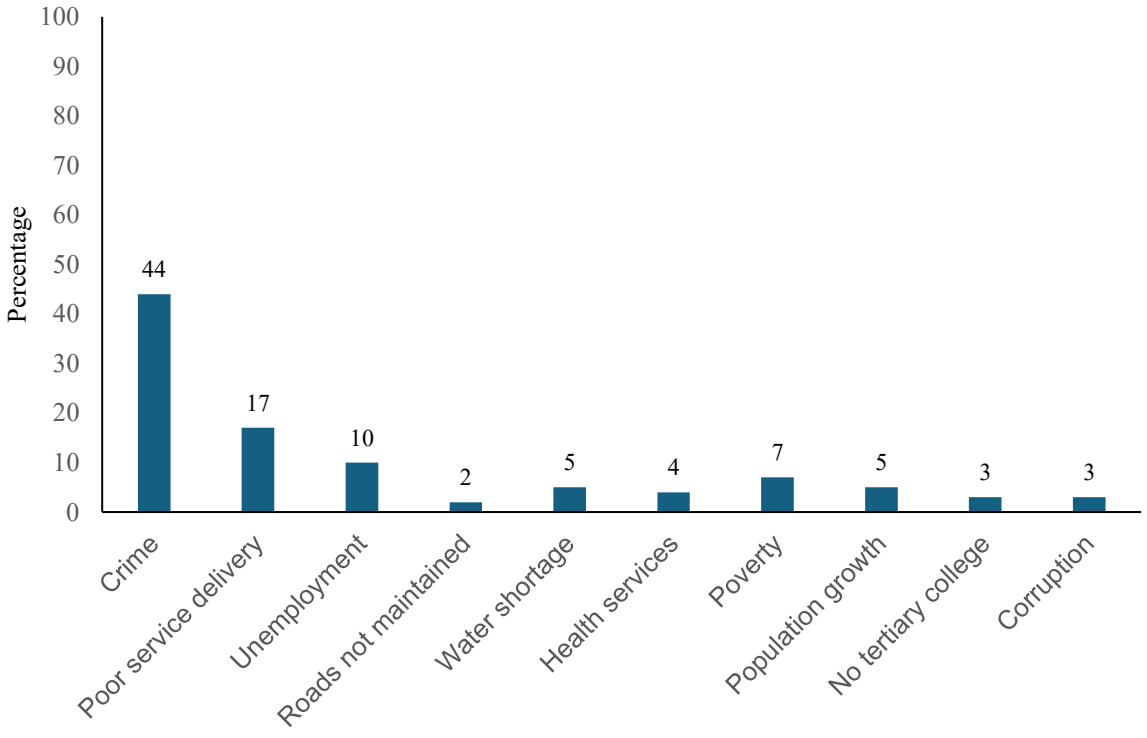

Figure 4.1: Challenges affecting the quality of life in Mkhuhlu Township

4.4 Respondents' Responses on Reasons Facilitating Settlement Expansion

Figure 4.2 graphically presents respondents' views on the reasons driving settlement expansion in Mkhuhlu. These findings are closely linked to growth pole theory, which explains how concentrated investment in industries can stimulate development and attract population growth. Historically, Mkhuhlu became a centre of development through the establishment of local industries, reflecting this theoretical framework.

The majority of respondents (57%) identified development and better infrastructure as the primary drivers of settlement expansion. 23% cited better opportunities, while 10% pointed to improved living standards. A smaller proportion (8%) mentioned independence, often associated with individuals leaving their parental households to establish new families, particularly upon marriage. Finally, 2% of respondents highlighted access to health services as a contributing factor.

Key-informant interviews reinforced these findings. Municipal officials, traditional leaders, and community representatives agreed that settlement expansion in Mkhuhlu is facilitated by development and infrastructure, independence, health services, better opportunities, and improved living standards. Notably, Mkhuhlu was rated as having comparatively better infrastructure than other areas in Bushbuckridge, making it an attractive location for expansion.

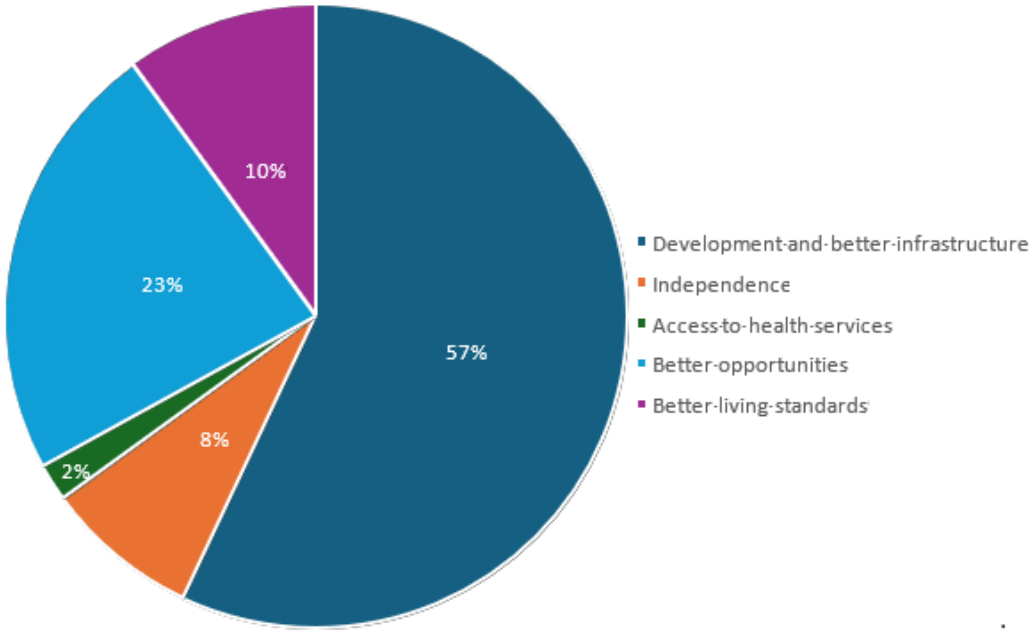

Figure 4.2: Respondents' responses on reasons facilitating settlement expansion

4.5 Settlement Expansion and Change over Time

Figure 4.3 presents aerial photographs illustrating the settlement expansion and spatial change of Mkhuhlu over time. The multi-temporal land-use maps show the spatial evolution of the settlement in 1980, 1990, and 2020, highlighting the transformation from a predominantly natural landscape to a rapidly expanding settlement.1980 - pre-expansion phase, the landscape was dominated by natural vegetation (green), with a sparse settlement footprint (minimal red) and limited agricultural transformation (yellow). 1990 - early transformation phase, this period marked the beginning of spatial change, with an increase in mixed land use (yellow), expansion of subsistence agriculture (green), and initial clustering of settlements (red). These changes reflected population growth and mounting land pressure. 2020 - rapid growth phase, by 2020, Mkhuhlu experienced significant expansion of built-up areas (red), fragmentation of vegetation (green), and greater landscape heterogeneity. This phase indicates accelerated urban and rural settlement growth, increased resource pressure, and reduced contiguous natural cover (yellow).

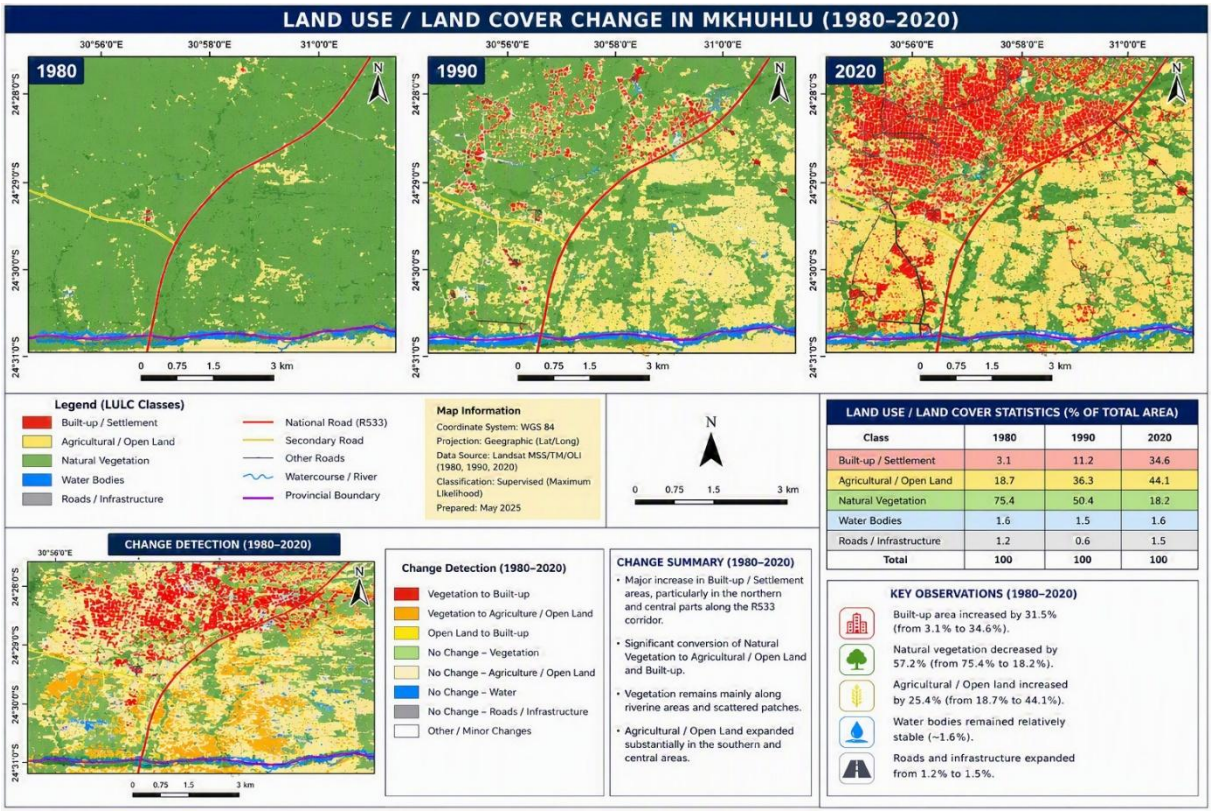

Figure 4.3: Land use/land cover change in Mkhuhlu (1980 – 2020)

Figure 4.4 presents aerial photographs illustrating the settlement expansion and spatial change of Mkhuhlu over time. These photographs were acquired for this study with the assistance of the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality GIS office. The observed changes reflect the influence of growth pole theory, which explains how concentrated development initiatives stimulate settlement growth.

- 2008 – Early stage of expansion. The aerial photograph shows limited settlement occupation in areas such as Hoxani, Section F, and College View; a few houses were located near provincial and district roads, and large sections remained uninhabited.
- 2017 – Emerging expansion phase. By 2017, settlement expansion had begun to escalate, and new housing clusters appeared along provincial and district roads, particularly near Hoxani College and the sports ground. This period marked the start of a significant spatial transformation.
- 2023 – Rapid expansion phase. The 2023 aerial photograph reveals extensive settlement growth, with previously unoccupied areas now densely inhabited. Expansion along provincial and district roads is evident, and settlement extensions have spread across multiple sections of Mkhuhlu.

The legend accompanying the maps highlights the demarcation of boundaries, including provincial, district, and municipal roads, which assisted in identifying settlement extensions. The comparative view of 2008, 2017, and 2023 provides clear evidence of how settlement expansion escalated in Mkhuhlu, first emerging between 2008 and 2017, and intensifying between 2018 and 2023

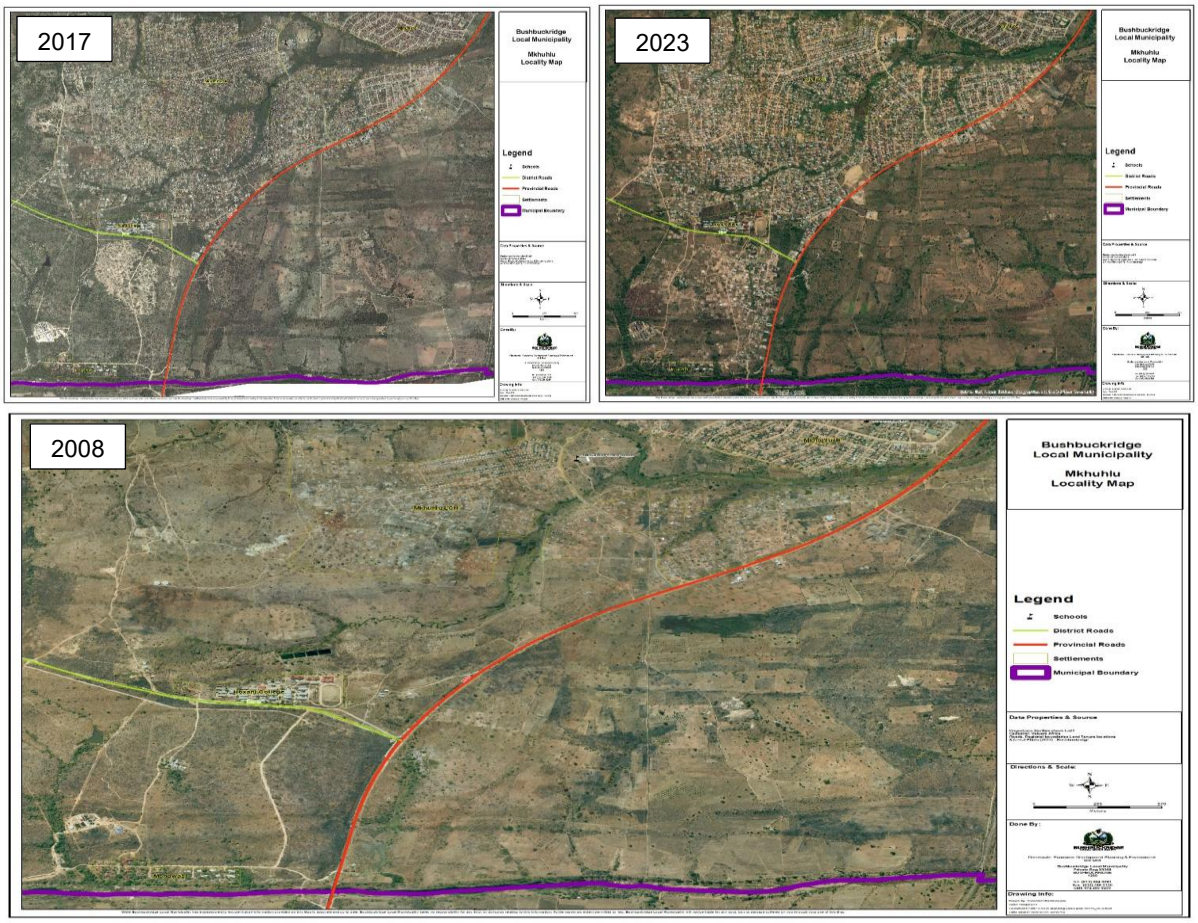

Figure 4.4: Mkhuhlu settlement expansion and change over time

Figure 4.5 presents a drone-captured aerial photograph of Mkhuhlu Section F in 2023, illustrating the most recent developments in the area. The image provides a clear indication of how settlement extension has transformed the landscape, with new housing clusters, expanded road networks, and visible construction activity.

This visual evidence highlights the rapid pace of settlement expansion in Section F, confirming the broader spatial change trends observed across Mkhuhlu. The photograph demonstrates how previously underdeveloped areas have become increasingly occupied, reflecting both population growth and socio-economic pressures driving settlement expansion.



Figure 4.5: Mkhuhlu Section F developments in 2023

4.6 Chapter Summary

The general picture of living standards in former homeland areas indicates that women tend to be happier, more satisfied, and more optimistic about the future compared to men. In terms of demographic profile, individuals with higher levels of education generally enjoy a better quality of life and face fewer socio-economic challenges. However, they also experience frustrations related to crime and service delivery, which often manifest in public protests within peripheral areas.

Unemployment remains a significant and persistent challenge in these regions, exacerbated by limited local economic investment and declining industrial activity. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic further weakened economic growth, leading to widespread business closures and retrenchments that intensified unemployment rates.

The study also identified poor communication between local government structures and the Hoxani Traditional Council regarding development initiatives, resulting in delays in service delivery. Young people were found to struggle with access to employment opportunities and remain heavily dependent on state social grants for survival. According to the World Bank Group (2024), South Africa must accelerate local economic growth and empower youth through targeted skills development, education,

and vocational training to improve employability and reduce dependency on social assistance.

CHAPTER 5:
DISCUSSION

This chapter reviews and interprets the results presented in Chapter 4, linking them to the existing literature and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. **It explores the connection between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu, highlighting their combined influence on socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation efforts.**

The discussion integrates quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how settlement growth patterns affect living standards and governance dynamics in peripheral areas. It further examines household characteristics and socio-economic conditions, factors influencing satisfaction with living standards, and the challenges impacting residents' quality of life. Finally, the chapter analyses respondents' demographic profiles and their perspectives on the drivers of settlement expansion, offering insights into how development, infrastructure, and governance interact to shape spatial and economic transformation in Mkhuhlu.

5.1 Household Characteristics and Socio-Economic Information of Mkhuhlu

The historical and political background of Mkhuhlu has contributed to significant population growth, shaped by both past and present socio-economic trends. Despite government interventions and social relief programmes aimed at redressing the injustices of apartheid, Mkhuhlu remains highly unequal. According to the National Treasury (2012), persistent unemployment and poor service delivery continue to undermine development. This study confirms that poverty is one of the most critical factors affecting the standard of living in Mkhuhlu.

The findings align with the literature reviewed. Van Huyssteen and Botha (2008) argued that former homeland areas are characterised by deep injustices, with most households living below the poverty line. Similarly, Kwenda et al. (2020) found that unemployment in these areas fuels social exclusion, crime, and instability. These

results directly support the first research objective: assessing the historical and political context of Mkhuhlu to provide a framework for understanding current settlement dynamics and governance structures.

Comparable evidence from other South African townships reinforces these findings. Zizzamia (2018) reported that Khayelitsha faces similar socio-economic challenges affecting living standards. Census data further highlight the worsening situation: in 2001, approximately 46% of Mkhuhlu residents were employed, mainly in social services, while 54% were unemployed (Stats SA, 2001). The present study shows that unemployment has increased since then, confirming a deteriorating trend.

Gender disparities in income were also evident. Males earned more than females, and unemployed men were more likely to be self-employed or engaged in temporary work. This finding is consistent with the OECD (2010) report, which noted that men generally have greater employment opportunities than women. However, the no-income group was equally distributed between genders, with social grants serving as the primary source of income. These grants, though inadequate to meet basic needs, remain vital for household survival. This supports Mathebula et al. (2017), who found that nearly half of households in peripheral areas rely on government relief programmes. Stats SA (2012a) similarly reported an increase in households without income due to limited job opportunities.

Education levels further shape socio-economic outcomes. This study found that most male respondents had no formal education compared to females. Despite this, respondents demonstrated an understanding of the study's objectives. The finding supports Reddy and Mncwango (2021), who concluded that education plays a critical role in redressing historical imbalances. Formal literacy is associated with improved living standards, employment, and income, suggesting that higher education levels enable residents to better understand the impacts of settlement expansion, socio-economic trends, and industrial revitalisation. This aligns with Andrews and McKennel (1980), who argued that perceptions of living standards are strongly influenced by education, income, and occupation.

The socio-economic instabilities observed in Mkhuhlu are not unique to South Africa. Nakarada and Vidojević (2023b) found parallels between South Africa and Serbia, noting that both countries share a history of colonisation that left enduring racial and

economic imbalances. Despite efforts to modernise and stabilise, both nations continue to face injustices and economic decline.

Finally, the growth pole theory provides a useful lens for interpreting these findings. As Adell (1999) argued, growth pole theory can stimulate LED and improve the quality of life through targeted investment in industries or the revitalisation of existing ones. This study demonstrates that applying growth pole theory to Mkhuhlu offers a framework for addressing unemployment, poverty, and socio-economic instability by prioritising industrial revitalisation and infrastructure development.

5.2 Factors Influencing Satisfaction with the Quality of Life in Mkhuhlu

The findings of this study reveal that gender and age are the most significant demographic predictors of life satisfaction in Mkhuhlu. Gender was found to exert the strongest influence, with women reporting higher levels of satisfaction than men. This aligns with Isaac and Tanga (2017), who observed that women generally express greater satisfaction with life compared to men. The literature corroborates this finding, with Ermiş-Mert (2023) emphasising that gender equality is a critical indicator of well-being. Living in gender-equal societies enhances satisfaction for both men and women, while unjust decisions compromise well-being and diminish life satisfaction.

The finding that gender influences quality of life supports Ermiş-Mert's (2023) argument that strengthening gender equality policies is essential to improving living standards. Without such policies, inequalities persist, particularly disadvantaging women. This outcome is directly linked to the final research objective, which sought to explore the transformation of quality of life in Mkhuhlu over time, focusing on current living conditions. Growth pole theory was instrumental in assessing these dynamics, highlighting innovation and industrial revitalisation as drivers of improved social and economic development.

Fisher (2012) similarly found that gender leaves a distinct footprint on life satisfaction, with differences evident across gender-equal and unequal contexts. Educational status and earnings further reinforce this footprint, as higher education and income levels are associated with greater satisfaction. Maponya and Moja (2012) also reported that women in peripheral areas were more likely to be satisfied with their standard of living than men. Stats SA (2022) revealed that 42% of households in South Africa were

female-headed, with provinces such as Mpumalanga (45.7%), KwaZulu-Natal, and Eastern Cape showing similar patterns. In contrast, urbanised provinces such as Gauteng (33.9%) had fewer female-headed households, influencing socio-economic trends and living standards.

Age was also found to influence life satisfaction in Mkhuhlu. Davids and Gaibie (2011) concurred that age shapes perceptions of living standards, with youth often reporting higher satisfaction than adults. In this study, younger respondents expressed greater optimism, largely because they remained dependent on their parents. Adults, however, shared similar views on life satisfaction and happiness, though with less optimism about the future. Household size, education level, and earned income were found to have weaker impacts on life satisfaction, suggesting that demographic factors such as gender and age are more decisive.

Broader literature reinforces these findings. Nyathi et al. (2024) highlighted that poverty, socio-economic instability, and non-enrolment collectively undermine living standards. The OECD (2010) noted that in hardship contexts, families often prioritise the education of male household members, further entrenching gender disparities in satisfaction. Rarieya et al. (2014) emphasised that poverty among girls limits educational attainment, thereby constraining their quality of life and aspirations. Ndagurwa and Miles-Timotheus (2024) argued that male-headed households are generally associated with better living standards compared to female-headed households.

Key informants in Mkhuhlu stressed that improving living standards and addressing gender inequality requires tackling unemployment, revitalising industries, and strengthening socio-economic frameworks. Strategies such as the LED framework, the Integrated Planning and Resource Plan (IPRP), and the NDP 2030 were identified as critical for addressing these challenges. These align with Shabalala and Gunter (2023), who argued that poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities are interconnected global challenges shaping well-being. Makaringe and Khobai (2018) further suggested that governments must rethink LED strategies, not only attracting investment but also empowering local communities to drive sustainable economic growth.

5.3 Challenges Affecting the Quality of Life in Mkhuhlu

The unavailability of resources within the municipality has constrained its ability to provide basic services, and the rapid population growth in Mkhuhlu has placed continuous pressure on service provision. Although Mkhuhlu was identified as a centre of economic development intended to serve surrounding communities with essential social services, most residents expressed dissatisfaction with service delivery. Their quality of life is compromised by safety concerns, limited employment opportunities, inadequate services, and a high crime rate. The South African Police Service (2024) confirmed that crime remains a major challenge in Mkhuhlu, with the provincial commissioner reporting several lives lost due to illegal firearms and urging communities to assist in curbing this threat.

Poor service delivery is not unique to Mkhuhlu. Zerihun and Mashigo (2022) identified inconsistency and inappropriate decision-making as key factors undermining LED in many municipalities. In Mkhuhlu, households often spend weeks without water, a finding consistent with Mafuwane et al. (2023), who linked water shortages to rapid settlement growth. The increase in population has triggered demand for bulk water supply, which the municipality lacks the capacity to provide.

According to Chen et al. (2014), service delivery encompasses the distribution of basic social and economic services to citizens. In Mkhuhlu, crime, unemployment, and poor service delivery collectively undermine the quality of life. Unemployment emerged as the most influential factor, with respondents reporting reliance on temporary jobs for survival (Stats SA, 2012b). Stats SA (2017) further revealed that poverty levels in South Africa have risen due to unemployment, a trend exacerbated in Mkhuhlu by the closure of local industries.

Greyling et al. (2020) highlighted the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns, noting increased dissatisfaction and negative emotions across South Africa. In Mkhuhlu, the closure of industries worsened living standards, with older respondents recalling how their parents lost jobs when industries were discontinued, while younger respondents, born after the closures, were less directly affected. The shutdown of industries contributed to unemployment, crime, and protests, findings supported by Barnes (2021) and Tshabalala and Gunter (2023), who emphasised that youth are disproportionately affected by job scarcity.

South Africa's economic stagnation has left many young people unemployed and lacking critical work skills, forcing reliance on state grants (Shankar et al., 2016). The World Bank Group (2024) stressed the need for strategic economic growth support to reduce unemployment and poverty. This aligns with the NDP 2030, which prioritises full employment, poverty elimination, and reduced inequality.

Revitalising the former homeland industries in Mkhuhlu was identified as a potential solution. When operational, these industries provided employment opportunities, though they were criticised for benefiting only a minority under apartheid. Their closure left lasting socio-economic challenges, including unemployment, poverty, and service delivery backlogs. Joshi (2017) argued that high unemployment reduces tax revenue and government spending capacity, further weakening service delivery.

Key informants acknowledged that while the municipality continues to provide services, shortcomings persist due to settlement expansion and population growth. They emphasised that service delivery projects are aligned with municipal strategies such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and the LED framework, which aim to stimulate economic growth.

The growth pole theory was effective in addressing the second research objective: examining how settlement growth influences socio-economic trends in Mkhuhlu. Adell (1999) argued that growth pole theory can boost LED and enhance the quality of life through targeted investment in industries or revitalisation of existing ones. Most participants in this study emphasised the urgent need to revitalise the former homeland industries to address unemployment, poverty, and service delivery challenges affecting Mkhuhlu residents.

5.4 Respondents' Responses on Reasons Facilitating Settlement Expansion

A liveable settlement must ensure appropriate service provision and guarantee a good quality of life for residents. Mkhuhlu, however, is characterised by a history of racial segregation and apartheid policies that shaped its economic growth trajectory. This study found that Mkhuhlu has experienced settlement growth across all sections in recent years and available spaces not originally earmarked for settlement purposes have increasingly been allocated for housing and informal businesses. This finding is

consistent with Donaldson and Kotze (2006), who observed that Mkhuhlu's expansion has attracted more middle-income households. Recent settlement growth has been particularly evident in Section F, Malubane, Hoxane, Mantangaleni, and College View, where middle-class residents are constructing luxury homes (personal observation).

Socio-political and economic transformations implemented in South Africa since 1994 sought to redress historical disparities. According to Mthiyane et al. (2022), these changes triggered socio-economic trends that accelerated settlement expansion, particularly in Mkhuhlu. This study found that growth was driven by Mkhuhlu's potential for LED, achievable through the LED strategy. As a result, Mantangaleni, Malubane, Section F, College View, and Hoxane experienced significant expansion in the post-apartheid era. However, rapid settlement growth has increased demand for services, contributing to instability, crime, and poor service delivery. These findings align with Mkhwanazi and Jili (2024), who reported that peripheral areas face poverty, unemployment, infrastructure strain, and rising informal settlements.

Key informants highlighted that inadequate implementation of spatial planning, particularly in areas under the authority of the Hoxani Traditional Council, has resulted in rapid settlement expansion and inappropriate land allocation. For example, land earmarked for business purposes has often been repurposed for housing due to community demand, creating conflict between traditional leaders and municipal officials. Migration into Mkhuhlu further intensifies these pressures, as people relocate in search of better socio-economic opportunities. This finding is supported by Macagnano (2002), who argued that settlement expansion in peripheral areas is driven by socio-economic policies and opportunities. However, Ramolobe (2023) noted that power dynamics between traditional authorities and municipalities often hinder effective development decision-making.

The study also revealed that the Hoxani Tribal Authority continues to exercise authority over residential land allocation in peripheral areas. Community members expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of settlement growth, noting its negative impact on service provision and living standards. Zerihun and Mashigo (2022) observed that poor service delivery is a widespread issue across municipalities, not limited to Mkhuhlu, and requires urgent intervention to ensure sustainable living standards.

The availability of basic social activities has made Mkhuhlu a target area for migration, further driving settlement demand. However, rapid growth must be controlled to ensure service delivery can meet rising needs. Mkhuhlu's recognition as a centre for LED within the municipal spatial development framework has triggered expansion, but inadequate investment and funding continue to undermine service provision.

The growth pole theory was effective in addressing the research objective of examining how settlement growth influences socio-economic conditions in Mkhuhlu. Growth pole theory provides a framework for assessing infrastructural development and identifying strategies to address challenges associated with settlement expansion. This study found a connection between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu, particularly regarding socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation.

These findings underscore the importance of good governance, effective spatial planning, and coordinated decision-making between traditional leaders and the municipality. They also highlight the need for frameworks that support settlement growth while ensuring service delivery and improved living standards. The Department of Human Settlements (2023) introduced a revised accreditation framework for municipalities to administer national housing programmes, aiming to capacitate municipalities to manage housing delivery without compromising short-term service provision.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The household characteristics and socio-economic information of Mkhuhlu reveal widespread dissatisfaction among residents with current living standards. The prevailing conditions reflect social and economic imbalances that compromise the quality of life. Key challenges identified include inadequate service provision, high levels of crime, and persistent unemployment. The closure of the Mkhuhlu industrial growth point further exacerbated these issues, resulting in job losses and heightened socio-economic vulnerability.

The findings support the notion that socio-economic trends, coupled with the neglect of Mkhuhlu's growth point industries, have undermined the initial vision of boosting the local economy. This neglect has directly impacted residents' satisfaction with their quality of life. Several households emphasised the importance of public participation

as a mechanism to confront overlooked issues, particularly in relation to service delivery. However, the study identified a lack of effective platforms for community engagement, leaving residents without opportunities to voice dissatisfaction.

Inadequate dissemination of information between the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM) and the Hoxani Traditional Council has further hindered decision-making processes. This gap in communication undermines coordinated development and delays the implementation of LED programmes that could benefit Mkhuhlu residents. Strengthening collaboration between municipal authorities and traditional leadership is therefore essential to accelerate LED initiatives, improve service delivery, and enhance living standards.

CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations derived from the study, directly addressing the aim: **to explore the connection between settlement expansion, quality of life, and local governance in Mkhuhlu, and to highlight their impact on socio-economic trends and industrial revitalisation efforts.** The aim was achieved through the following objectives:

- **Objective 1**: To assess the historical and political context of Mkhuhlu, providing a framework for understanding current settlement dynamics and governance structures.
- **Objective 2**: To examine how settlement growth has influenced the socio-economic conditions in Mkhuhlu.
- **Objective 3**: To analyse the transformation of the quality of life in Mkhuhlu over time, focusing specifically on the post-apartheid era.

The chapter synthesises the findings from previous sections, drawing together empirical evidence and theoretical insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of Mkhuhlu's settlement dynamics. It also outlines practical recommendations for policymakers, municipal authorities, and traditional leadership to address the challenges identified and to foster sustainable development.

6.1 Conclusion

6.1.1 Research Objective 1

The first research objective was to assess the historical and political context of Mkhuhlu, providing a framework for understanding current settlement dynamics and governance structures. This objective was achieved through a review of relevant literature and the application of growth pole theory to interpret social, economic, and political transitions in the area.

The findings confirm that Mkhuhlu possesses significant potential for economic growth, rooted in policies and infrastructure established during apartheid. However, this

potential has not been fully utilised to benefit residents. The legacy of racial segregation remains visible in the settlement's infrastructure, which continues to attract migrants but has not been leveraged to redress socio-economic challenges.

Key facilities such as the railway station, once central to trade and service delivery, are no longer operational. Similarly, the adjacent Mkhuhlu industrial area, formerly an economic hub, has been neglected, resulting in widespread unemployment and declining living standards. The discontinuation of industries led to the closure of firms, job losses, and deterioration in community well-being.

Despite these challenges, the Mkhuhlu Plaza shopping centre continues to enhance the quality of life for residents and tourists, particularly given its strategic location along the route to Kruger National Park. Nevertheless, community members consistently emphasised the need for industrial revitalisation, believing that restoring Mkhuhlu's industries would generate employment and improve living standards.

The imbalances of the past remain unresolved, with social and economic injustices continuing to affect peripheral areas. Addressing these legacies requires the implementation of policies that strengthen economic development and spatial equity. Revitalising the Mkhuhlu growth point is therefore critical to enhancing livelihoods, reducing unemployment, and improving the quality of life for residents.

6.1.2 Research Objective 2

The second research objective was to examine how settlement growth has influenced socio-economic conditions in Mkhuhlu. This objective was achieved through reviewing relevant literature, analysing settlement growth patterns, and applying growth pole theory to interpret socio-economic transitions.

The findings confirm that rapid settlement expansion in Mkhuhlu has contributed to a range of socio-economic challenges, including inadequate service delivery, poverty, crime, unemployment, and slow economic growth. Key informants highlighted that the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM) faces mounting pressure to provide services efficiently due to population growth and increasing settlement demands.

Participants noted that living standards in Mkhuhlu were perceived to be better during apartheid compared to the post-apartheid era. At that time, employment opportunities were more readily available, crime was lower, resources met community needs, and

service delivery was prioritised. The establishment of the Mkhuhlu industrial growth point played a vital role in strengthening the local economy and improving living standards. However, apartheid policies simultaneously excluded many residents from participating fully in economic growth, leaving a legacy of inequality.

The discontinuation of industries and subsequent rapid settlement expansion created social and economic imbalances. The municipality has struggled to meet the basic needs of the growing population, resulting in deteriorating livelihoods and compromised quality of life. The literature and data collected in this study revealed that Mkhuhlu's challenges mirror those of other peripheral areas, where inadequate service delivery and weak economic growth undermine well-being.

Overall, Mkhuhlu's existing settlement pattern is not economically viable. It fails to provide sufficient employment opportunities or adequate access to social and municipal services, thereby limiting residents' ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated governance, revitalisation of local industries, and strategic investment in infrastructure to ensure that settlement growth translates into improved socio-economic outcomes.

6.1.3 Research Objective 3

The third research objective was to analyse the transformation of quality of life in Mkhuhlu, focusing on the post-apartheid era and current living standards. This objective was achieved through the application of developmental frameworks and growth pole theory to assess how policies and investment strategies have influenced socio-economic trends over time.

The findings confirm that while Mkhuhlu has potential for economic development, rapid settlement expansion and weak governance have compromised service delivery and quality of life. Growth pole theory proved effective in explaining how targeted investment strategies could accelerate development in areas with economic potential, while also supporting peripheral settlements with lower growth capacity. The study highlights the need for policies that attract direct investment to peripheral areas, thereby strengthening the local economy and improving living standards.

Participants consistently emphasised that the revitalisation of Mkhuhlu industries would be effective in creating employment and improving livelihoods. However,

corruption was identified as a major barrier to development, delaying progress and undermining trust in governance. Residents reported relocating to Mkhuhlu for better services, infrastructure, employment, education, and family proximity, yet many experienced poor service delivery in the post-apartheid era.

The study revealed significant gaps in stakeholder engagement, with residents expressing dissatisfaction over limited communication and transparency. Public participation remains weak, leaving communities feeling neglected and excluded from decision-making processes. Improving quality of life, therefore, requires stronger mechanisms for human development, business empowerment, and targeted funding for young entrepreneurs and small businesses. These measures would stimulate job creation, infrastructure investment, and socio-economic transformation.

The findings also support the revitalisation of the Mkhuhlu industrial park, which has substantial potential to address socio-economic challenges. Government commitments, including the proposed business plan for the industrial park, demonstrate recognition of this potential. In addition, the Agri-hub initiative was identified as a promising intervention to strengthen LED and address persistent socio-economic challenges in Mkhuhlu.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Establishing a local business forum in Mkhuhlu

There is a pressing need to establish a local business forum in Mkhuhlu to address high unemployment rates and widespread dissatisfaction with economic conditions (see Section 4.3). This initiative can be achieved through a strategic partnership between the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM), the Hoxani Traditional Council, and the Industrial Development Corporation's Integrated Planning and Resource Plan (IPRP).

Such collaboration would attract investors, strengthen local economic growth, and improve socio-economic trends in Mkhuhlu. This recommendation aligns with participant statements highlighting the need for the municipality and traditional office to resolve the issue of Mkhuhlu Industrial Park ownership. Historically, the park was owned by the Limpopo Development Corporation, but its current ownership remains unresolved, creating uncertainty that hinders revitalisation efforts.

6.2.2 Implementation of development policies and improving the existing ones

There is a critical need to implement policies to improve living standards for Mkhuhlu residents, as highlighted in Section 5.2. This can be achieved through the effective execution of the LED strategy and the Integrated Planning and Resource Plan (IPRP), aligned with the national framework for LED. Successful implementation of these strategies will enhance the standard of living, reduce poverty, and strengthen socio-economic resilience in Mkhuhlu.

This recommendation is supported by participant narratives, which emphasised that development initiatives must be community-based and inclusive of public participation. Active engagement of residents in decision-making processes will ensure that policies reflect local needs and foster accountability.

The recommendation also aligns with the NDP 2030, which prioritises full employment, poverty eradication, and reduced inequality. Integrating LED and IPRP strategies with the NDP framework will strengthen economic growth and industrial revitalisation, thereby addressing the injustices that continue to affect previously disadvantaged communities.

If these developmental policies are implemented effectively, they will:

- Enhance local economic growth by attracting investment and revitalising industries.
- Reduce unemployment through job creation and skills development.
- Improve service delivery by aligning municipal planning with community priorities.
- Strengthen social equity by addressing historical injustices and empowering marginalised groups.

6.2.3 Fostering sustainable economic growth

There is a need to support and diversify the local economy in Mkhuhlu by attracting investments aligned with developmental frameworks, particularly in manufacturing and renewable energy. Diversification will reduce reliance on a single industry, strengthen resilience, and improve residents' quality of life, as highlighted in Section 5.3. This can be achieved by integrating small and midsize enterprises (SMEs) into the local

economy, enabling them to access finance, enterprise and supplier development services, and mentorship programs. Such support would foster entrepreneurship, create jobs, and stimulate a more dynamic and inclusive economy.

Equally important is ensuring that community members actively participate in shaping socio-economic trends. This can be facilitated through:

- Participatory budgeting allows residents to influence resource allocation.
- Community consultations to ensure development initiatives reflect local priorities.
- Establishment of LED forums to strengthen collaboration between the municipality, traditional authorities, the private sector, and residents.

By diversifying the economy and embedding community participation, Mkhuhlu can build a sustainable development path that enhances livelihoods, reduces unemployment, and fosters long-term socio-economic stability.

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Appendix A: Respondent Questionnaire for Mkhuhlu Residents

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

For

MKHUHLU DEVELOPMENT STUDY

Dear Respondent,

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect data as input for a study for the degree MSc in Geography at the University of South Africa. The study is entitled Investigating Settlement Expansion, The Quality of Life, and Socio-Economic Trends in a Peripheral Former Homeland Border Town: The Case of Mkhuhlu, Mpumalanga (South Africa).

The purpose of the questionnaire is to collect information that can be of assistance in making Mkhuhlu economic and socially sustainable. Thank you for your co-operation. Be assured you that the information collected via questionniare will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used only for the purposes of this study.

Section A: Livability and the Quality of life in Mkhuhlu

No.	Variables	Code					Selected Code
1	Gender	0 = Female 1 = Male					
2	Race	1 = Black African	2 = White	3 = Asian or Indian	4 = Colored	5 = Others, Specify	
3	Age	1 = Less than 35 yrs.	2 = 36 – 45 yrs.	3 = 46 – 55 yrs.	4 = > 56 yrs.		
4	Number of household members	1 = 1 – 5	2 = 6 – 10	3 = > 10			
5	Level of education for parents	1 = No formal education	2 = Primary education	3 = Secondary education	4 = Tertiary education	5 = Other, Specify	
6	Level of education for siblings	1 = No formal education	2 = Primary education	3 = Secondary education	4 = Tertiary education	5 = Other, Specify	
7	Household language	1 = Xitsonga	2 = Siswati	3 = Sepedi	4 = isiZulu	5 = Other, Specify	
8	Do you receive any household income	1= Yes	2= No				

9	Household income		1 = <R500	2 = R501 – R1000	3 = R1001 – R2500	4 = >R2501	5 = N/A	
10	Household expenditure per month:	Electricity	1 = <R200	2 = R201 – R400	3 = R401 – R600	4 = >R601	5 = N/A	
		Transport	1=<R200	2=R201-R400	3=R401-R600	4=>R601	5 = N/A	
		Water	1 = <R200	2 = R201 – R400	3 = R401 – R600	4 = >R601	5 = N/A	
		Food	1=<R200	2=R201-R400	3=R401-R600	4=>R601	5 = N/A	
		Other, Specify	1=<R200	2=R201-R400	3=R401-R600	4=>R601	5 = N/A	

No.	Variables	Code	Selected Code
11	Type of Income	1 = Social Grants; 2 = Employment; 3= Other, Specify	
12	Household head	1 = Child; 2 = Female; 3 = Male	
13	Farming experience	1 = 0 – 5 years; 2 = 6 – 10 years; 3 = 11 – 20 years; 4 = 21>	
14	Employment status	1 = Farming fulltime; 2 = Working fulltime; 3 = Unemployed; 4 = Other, Specify	

Section B: Socio-Economic Trends

1	Is your source of income assisting to feed your family/household?	1 = Yes	2 = No		
2	Do you have additional source of income?	1 = Yes	2 = No		
3	Have you previously been employed in Mkhuhlu? And are you employed now?	1 = Yes	2 = No		
4	Did the closing of Mkhuhlu industries influenced your standard of leaving?	1 = Yes	2 = No		
5	Do you think revitalisation of Mkhuhlu industries can address unemployment	1 = Yes	2 = No	3 = Not sure	
6	Where did you/your family/head of the household resided before moving to Mkhuhlu?				
7	Why did you/your family relocate to Mkhuhlu?				
8	What triggers settlement expansion at Mkhuhlu?				
9	How does settlement expansion affect you/household?				
10	What are your future socio-economic expectations for Mkhuhlu?				
11	Do the commercial facilities in Mkhuhlu satisfy their needs?				

Section C: Role of Bushbuckridge Municipality & Stakeholder Engagement

1	Is Bushbuckridge Local Municipality providing services for Mkhuhlu?	1 = Yes	2 = No	
2	What services is the municipality providing?			
3	How is the relationship between the municipality and the community in terms of service delivery?			
4	What can the municipality do to strengthen local economic growth at Mkhuhlu?			
5	What opportunities exist in Mkhuhlu?			
6	What is your overall impression about local government?			
7	Does Mkhuhlu have capacity to alleviate poverty? And what can be done?			
8	Is the community of Mkhuhlu involved during decision making?			

9	Do you understand the importance of settlement expansion? And what can you suggest regarding Mkhuhlu settlement growth?	
10	What are you satisfied with as a resident of Mkhuhlu? And What are you unsatisfied with?	
11	Does the municipality engage Mkhuhlu residents regarding service provision?	
12	What do you view as the main challenges that you experience by living here in Mkhuhlu?	
13	How can your standard of living be improved?	
14	How do you think the sustainability of the Mkhuhlu community can be improve?	
15	Any suggestions about the upgrading of Mkhuhlu's industries?	
16	Do you think the implementation of government policies can improve Mkhuhlu's development?	
17	Do the community play a role in ensuring that Mkhuhlu industrial point is resuscitated?	

Appendix B: Focus Group Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect data as input for a study for the degree MSc in Geography at the University of South Africa. The study is entitled Investigating Settlement Expansion, The quality of Life, and Socio-Economic Trends in a Peripheral Former Homeland Border Town: The Case of Mkhuhlu, Mpumalanga (South Africa).

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

For

MKHUHLU DEVELOPMENT STUDY

The purpose of the questionnaire is to collect information that can be of assistance in making Mkhuhlu economic and socially sustainable. Thank you for your co-operation. Be assured you that the information collected via questionniare will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used only for the purposes of this study.

Section A: Sustainability (Social, Economic & Environmental)

1	Is your source of income assisting to feed your family/household?
2	Do you have additional source of income?
3	Have you previously been employed in Mkhuhlu? And are you employed now?
4	Did the closing of Mkhuhlu industries influenced your standard of living?
5	Do you think revitalisation of Mkhuhlu industries can address unemployment?
6	Where did you/your family/head of the household resided before moving to Mkhuhlu?

7	Why did you/your family relocate to Mkhuhlu?
8	What triggers settlement expansion at Mkhuhlu?
9	How does settlement expansion affect you/household?
10	What are your future socio-economic expectations for Mkhuhlu?
11	Do the commercial facilities in Mkhuhlu satisfy their needs?

Section B: Role of Bushbuckridge Municipality & Stakeholder Engagement

1	Is Bushbuckridge Local Municipality providing services for Mkhuhlu?
2	What services is the municipality providing?
3	How is the relationship between the municipality and the community in terms of service delivery?
4	What can the municipality do to strengthen local economic growth at Mkhuhlu?
5	What opportunities exist in Mkhuhlu?
6	What is your overall impression about local government?
7	Does Mkhuhlu have capacity to alleviate poverty? And what can be done?
8	Is the community of Mkhuhlu involved during decision making?
9	Do you understand the importance of settlement expansion? And what can you suggest regarding Mkhuhlu settlement growth?
10	What are you satisfied with as a resident of Mkhuhlu? And What are you unsatisfied with?

11	Does the municipality engage Mkhuhlu residents regarding service provision?
12	What do you view as the main challenges that you experience by living here in Mkhuhlu?
13	How can your standard of living be improved?
14	How do you think the sustainability of the Mkhuhlu community can be improve?
15	Any suggestions about the upgrading of Mkhuhlu's industries?
16	Do you think the implementation of government policies can improve Mkhuhlu's development?
17	Do the community play a role in ensuring that Mkhuhlu industrial point is resuscitated?
18	Do you have any plans to relocate from Mkhuhlu, if yes please motivate?
19	Which role is Hoxani Traditional Council plays to the community and which role is Bushbuckridge Local Municipality plays to the community?
20	Describe the standard of living of Mkhuhlu before 1994 and after 1994.

Appendix C: Ethical Clearance

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA-CAES HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date: 13/02/2022

NHREC Registration # : REC-170616-051
REC Reference # : 2022/CAES_HREC/045
Name : Mr SS Mkansi
Student #: 49086618

Dear Mr Mkansi

Decision: Ethics Approval from 10/02/2022 to 31/01/2025

Researcher(s): Mr SS Mkansi
49086618@mylife.unisa.ac.za; 082-642-7417

Supervisor (s): Prof AC Horn
hornac@unisa.ac.za; 011-471-2168

Working title of research:

Settlement expansion, land-use change, and spatial planning in a peripheral former homeland border town: The case of Mkhuhlu, Mpumalanga (South Africa)

Qualification: MSc Geography

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa-CAES Health Research Ethics Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for three years, **subject to further clarification and submission of yearly progress reports. Failure to submit the progress report will lead to withdrawal of the ethics clearance until the report has been submitted.**

The researcher is cautioned to adhere to the Unisa protocols for research during Covid-19.

Due date for progress report: 31 January 2023

The progress report is available on the college ethics webpage: https://w2.unisa.ac.za/www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Agriculture-%26-Environmental-Sciences/Research/Research-Ethics.html

Please note the points below for further action:

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

1. Please provide more detail on the analysis of the qualitative data.

*The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the UNISA-CAES Health Research Ethics Committee on 10 February 2022 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

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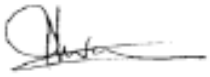
*The reference number **2022/CAES_HREC/045** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,



Prof MA Antwi
Chair of UNISA-CAES Health REC
E-mail: antwima@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (011) 670-9391



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Appendix D: Declaration by Language Editor

Rephrase it!
Academic Text Editing

17 Fallopius Street, Bloemfontein
+(27) 076 081 0730
info@rephraseit.co.za

04 November 2025

Student: **Samuel Mkansi**
Student number: **49086618**

I declare that I language edited the master's dissertation titled, *Investigating settlement expansion, the quality of life, and socio-economic trends in a peripheral former homeland border town: The case of Mkhuhlu, Mpumalanga (South Africa)*

During the editing process, I looked for and corrected spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraph and syntax errors. Where I noticed inconsistencies or unclarities in the text, I made comments to draw the author's attention to the inconsistency or unclarity. I also made suggestions where changes could be made. Lastly, I double-checked the references in the text and in the reference list to make sure that they are consistent throughout. Where sources or source information were still missing, I indicated such to the author so that he could locate and add the missing information. I also checked that all sources that are cited in the text are cited in the reference list and vice versa.

Disclaimer: The ultimate responsibility for accepting or rejecting the changes and recommendations rests with the student and I cannot be held responsible for any layout or language issues that might have emerged as a result of subsequent amendments to the text.

Yours sincerely

Johannes Pieter Odendaal

