Climate Change and the Tourism Sector

The tourism sector is a highly climate-sensitive sector. Climate change is not a remote future event for your business; it is happening and has had negative impacts on tourism in Kenya. As an example, in mid-2012, the main highway to the Masai Mara National Reserve, one of the most popular tourism destinations in Kenya, was closed for three days due to flooding and earth movement damage. Around the same period, Mombasa, a major tourist destination city, experienced flooding. Climate change affects tourism destinations, and their competitiveness and sustainability.

Coastal rainforests, marine ecosystems, wildlife and Mt. Kenya’s glaciers make Kenya one of the top tourist destinations in the world and Africa’s fifth largest tourist destination. In 2012, Kenya received 1.24 million international visitors; and in 2011 the tourism industry contributed approximately 14 per cent to GDP and employed about 12 per cent of Kenya’s workforce. Wildlife tourism, including to Kenya’s numerous national parks and reserves, represented around 70 per cent of tourism revenue.

Tourism is Kenya’s third largest earner of foreign exchange after tea and coffee exports, generating US$ 4.7 billion in 2011 according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.

Climate change is beginning to influence decision-making in the tourism sector, but accounting for climate change is not common in business activities and decisions. Your business will need to adapt and build resilience, preparing assets and operations for climate impacts. While the tourism sector is a low overall emitter of greenhouse gases in Kenya, a good business decision is to reduce emissions and the overall environmental footprint of your business. This leads to cost savings and can position your company as sustainable or eco-friendly. Sustainable tourism is a growing and important segment of the tourism industry.

How Climate Change Impacts Your Tourism Business

Climate change affects a wide range of environmental resources that are critical attractions for tourists, such as wildlife, biodiversity, and water levels and quality. It also has an important influence on environmental conditions and incidents that can deter tourists, such as very high temperatures, infectious disease, wildfires, increased wildlife mortality, and insects and waterborne pests. Damage to infrastructure, such as roads and buildings, can...

Box 1: Sustainable Tourism

Chris Breen, Chairman of the Association of Independent Tour Operators’ Sustainable Tourism Committee, has noticed an increased desire from people travelling overseas to ensure that they are doing it the right way. He remarked, “If a company cannot be bothered to offer sustainable holidays, by definition it must have a limited lifespan. If what a company is offering is destroying the very place it relies upon, then the product is finite.”

Sustainable tourism is better for destinations, better for people, better for the environment – and better for your business.

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limit access to tourist attractions and add to your operating costs.

Several possible future risks to your tourism business were identified in Kenya’s National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP):

- Coastal and island destinations are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (such as storms, coastal erosion, physical damage to infrastructure, sea level rise, flooding, water shortages and water contamination) because most tourist establishments are located within a short distance of the shoreline.

- Extreme events, especially more frequent droughts, negatively impact wildlife and biodiversity and can lead to fewer opportunities for resorts and safari operators.

- Gradual changes in temperature and precipitation prompting species to migrate to more favourable habitats can negatively impact certain locations for wildlife-based tourism.

- Changing environmental conditions caused by climate change can deter tourists, such as infectious disease, wildfires, and insect or water-borne pests (jellyfish, algae blooms).

- Increases in average annual temperature are likely to severely compromise or eliminate certain ecologically sensitive tourist destinations, such as the glaciers of Mount Kenya, sensitive marine ecosystems, and coastal rainforests.

- The action plan shows that climate change is real and happening in Kenya, and has impacted businesses in the tourism sector:

  - Extreme weather events have reduced access to tourist destinations because of damage to road infrastructure, as was the case in the Maasai Mara in 2011 due to flash flooding.

  - Reduction in Mara River flows (driven in part by climatic variation, but also by degradation of the Mau catchment) has negatively impacted the migration of wildebeests through the Mara River from the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania to Kenya’s Maasai Mara National Reserve.

  - The Kenya Wildlife Service has claimed that droughts are pushing lions closer to waterholes adjacent to human settlements, fuelling human-wildlife conflict.

  - Bleaching of Kenya’s coral reefs has been observed.

  - The Grevy’s Zebra population in Samburu National Reserve was placed under severe threat in 2007 due to an outbreak of anthrax caused by drought in Northern Kenya.

The tourism industry has a strong potential to deliver continued economic growth and employment for Kenya, but adaptive actions are important to manage the worst impacts of climate change. While climate change certainly poses risks to your business, it brings new economic opportunities such as sustainable tourism.

Box 2: Reducing Your Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- Monitor energy consumption to determine opportunities for reduction.
- Install energy-efficient lighting – replace incandescent lamps with compact fluorescent lamps or light emitting diodes (LEDs).
- Install sensors for lighting in areas and rooms that are not constantly used.
- Install sensors and timers to control heating and lighting based on occupation of areas.
- Install double-glazing and draught excluders.
- Install environmentally friendly hot water systems (such as solar thermal or heat recovery systems).
- Maintain equipment regularly to prevent efficiency losses and reduce heat losses or gains. This includes appliances, pipes, air-conditioning systems and insulation.
- Regularly monitor energy usage and observe any trends.
- Explore ideas from staff – they may suggest useful energy-saving options.
- Install shading to reduce heat gain from the sun.

cient passenger vehicles. A concerted pro-
gram could help to create a niche market
by branding Kenya as an environmentally
responsible low-carbon footprint destina-
tion.

Climate Change and Your
Tourism Business: What can
you do?

• Assess the climate risks to your busi-
ness. A systematic risk analysis would
help to identify specific risks to your
business and provide information for
your business planning (see Briefing
Note #2 – Climate Proofing Your Busi-
ness).

• Take action to adapt to climate
change. Your actions depends on the
location and nature of your business,
and can include:
  - Ensuring your premises will be com-
fortable in hotter weather, without
relying on air conditioning.
  - Ensuring your buildings and infra-
structure can cope with heavier
downpours.
  - Being prepared in the case of floods.
  - Managing your grounds for chang-
ing conditions and making space for
wildlife to adapt.

  - Incorporating expected climate im-
pacts in planning and decision-mak-
ing, such as siting of resorts and ho-
tels.

KEPSA can assist you by providing a list of
publically available climate risk assessment
tools (see Tools and Planning Instruments
to Assess Climate Change Impacts).

• Be part of the solution by reducing
greenhouse gas emissions. Your tour-
ist business has numerous opportuni-
ties to reduce greenhouse gas emis-
sions (see Box 2 for examples). Cost
savings will result from reductions in
your energy use through improvements
in lighting, heating, cooling, applian-
ces, fuel use and energy management,
among others. You can support vol-
tuntary carbon offsetting, including for
flights, which is one aspect of sustain-
able tourism.

• Become a sustainable tourism opera-
tor. Sustainable tourism is usually de-
ined as holiday travel that attempts to
reduce harm to the environment and
local people and cultures. The Ken-
ya Federation of Tourism identifies respon-
sible tourism business practices that
you can adopt, including:
  - Use of sustainable and eco-friendly
materials.
  - Resource saving initiatives.
  - Waste reduction and management.
  - Health and safety policy and proce-
dures.
  - Supporting local economies and
communities by supporting local ini-
tiatives.

• Work with the Kenya Tourist Fed-
eration to promote Kenya as a leader
in sustainable tourism by creating
a positive, climate-friendly image.
Many tourists are looking to reduce their
environmental footprint and produce
fewer greenhouse gas emissions. The Ken-
ya Tourist Federation can promote
ecotourism and sustainable tourism by
highlighting successful business mod-
els with an environmentally responsi-
ble low-carbon footprint. Encourage
the federation to develop guidelines on
resource efficiency and greening the
sector. You, as a business owner, play
an important role in increasing resource
efficiency, protecting attractions and
wildlife, and developing Kenya as a sus-
tainable tourism market.

Box 3: Sustainable Tourism in Kenya

Some Kenyan community lodges
have developed into sustainable
tourist destinations. Originally these
lodges were built by farmsteads,
particularly in the Laikipia region,
that decided to switch from livestock
to wildlife conservation as a means
of income. The sustainable tourism
aspect comes from engaging the
local community as a stakeholder
in the building of accommodation in
these private conservation areas and
directing a percentage of the profit to
that community. In addition, some of
these lodges have installed solar water
heaters and energy efficient lighting.

Source: Blue and Green Tomorrow (2012),
Authentic Travel, The Guide to Sustainable
Tourism (Lincoln, UK: Blue and Green
Communications), pages 31-32.
Endnotes