

BIG READ / ENVIRONMENT



HERITAGE ON BRINK OF DEGRADATION DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Kenya's six heritage sites risk being permanently changed or degraded due to rising sea-level, higher temperatures, habitat shifts and more frequent extreme weather events

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Kenya's six heritage sites risk being permanently changed or degraded due to rising sea-level, higher temperatures, habitat shifts and more frequent extreme weather events

such as storms, floods and droughts. A new report, 'World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate', jointly released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), the United Nations Environment Programme (Unep), and the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), says climate change is fast becoming one of the most

significant risks for World Heritage sites. There are more than 1,000 World Heritage properties in 163 countries and a great many of them are important tourist destinations. Kenya is a home to six unique world heritage sites identified by the Unesco. Clustered in different categories, Kenya's heritage sites have been

identified precisely because of their cultural, historical, natural and archaeological value. Lamu Old Town, Fort Jesus, Kenya's lake system, Lake Turkana national parks, Mount Kenya National Park and the Mijikenda Kaya forest are Kenya's heritage sites, that are some of the country's tourist attraction. In 2001, the World Heritage

committee inscribed Lamu Old Town on the Unesco World Heritage List. The town of Lamu began as a 14th century Swahili settlement, but the island has seen many visitors and influences, including Portuguese explorers, Turkish traders and the Omani Arabs. Fort Jesus on the other hand was also inscribed in 2001 and is a National Monument, standing high over the Mombasa harbor. It was built by the Portuguese in 1593-1596 to the designs of Giovanni Battista Cairati to protect the port of Mombasa. It is one of the most outstanding and well preserved examples of the 16th Portuguese military fortification and a landmark in the history of this type of construction. Lake Bogoria, Lake Nakuru and Lake Elementaita are Kenya's iconic Heritage having been inscribed in 2001. Turkana has in the recent past been referred to as the cradle of mankind after recent fossil evidence was unearthed at Koobi Fora. The region, which was inscribed as a heritage site in 1997, is one of the longest living histories on earth. Apart from the breath-taking heritage sites, Kenya is also the home to the most iconic wildlife as well as species. The report warns that hundreds of the world's heritage sites, usually sites to behold, risk being degraded by the impacts of climate change.

"Unequivocal scientific evidence shows that concentrations of the main greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere, are greater now than at any time in the past 800,000 years and that global temperatures have increased by 1 degree celsius since 1880. As temperatures continue to rise, heat waves will worsen, extreme precipitation events will become more intense and frequent, oceans will continue to warm and acidify, and the rate of sea-level rise will increase," the report says.

The report adds that the direct and indirect impacts of climate change may present a threat to their outstanding universal value, integrity and authenticity.

According to the report that was released during the just ended second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) at Unep headquarters in Gigiri, climate change is a threat multiplier, and will increase vulnerability and exacerbate other stresses including, but not limited to, pollution, conflict over resources, urbanisation, habitat fragmentation, loss of intangible cultural heritage and the impacts of unplanned or poorly managed tourism.

Thousands of delegates from 174 countries, 120 at the ministerial level, took part in UNEA-2 and associated side events on issues of global importance, including the Sustainable Innovation Expo and the Science-Policy Forum from May 23-27.

UNEA is the world's most authoritative decision-making body on the environment, tasked with tackling some of the most critical issues of our time. Creation of the Assembly means that the environment is now considered amongst the world's key concerns alongside other major global issues such as peace, security, finance and health.

During the conference, far reaching decisions were reached on issues such as marine litter, the illegal trade in wildlife, air pollution, chemicals and waste, and sustainable consumption and production - which are an integral part of the global action needed to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement.

After the Paris Agreement, one of the most significant environmental agreements in recent decades, UNEA also agreed that Unep should accelerate support to countries, especially developing countries, to build national readiness capacity to implement the agreement, build implementation capacity and capacity to access finance and technology.

UNEP outgoing executive director Achim Steiner said the decisions made will see a significant directional shift that will inform ministers' decisions in their home countries.

"We will now need to see the bold and decisive commitment observed at UNEA transmitted at the national level to drive forward the 2030 Agenda and ensure a brighter future for people

and planet," he said.

The heritage report however, now paints a bleak future for the country especially the ailing tourism sector.

It says world heritage sites which are nature's partner, continue to play a critical role to country's development and the impacts of the climate change will hit them hard.

An economic survey for 2015 says tourism sector continued to be an important source of foreign exchange earnings in 2014. The economic survey says tourism experienced decreased performance owing to a number of factors such as insecurity mainly associated with terror attacks, adverse travel advisories and the spread of Ebola in West African countries.

According to the 2015 survey report, tourism earnings decreased by 7.3 per cent from Sh 94.0 billion in 2013, to Sh 87.1 billion in 2014 as a consequence of the challenges faced. This was attributed to a decrease of 11.1 per cent in the number of international visitor arrivals over the same period mainly due to adverse negative travel advisories by key source markets.

The World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate report, says the tourism sector remains one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economic sectors, responsible for nine per cent of gross domestic product globally and providing one in 11 jobs.

"Tourism is heavily reliant on energy-intensive modes of transport including aeroplanes and automobiles. Currently contributing approximately five per cent of the global total, carbon emissions from tourism are predicted to more than double within 25 years," the report says.

According to the report, adaptation capacity in the tourism sector varies and it is likely to be especially hard for communities and operators with large investments.

"Investments such as infrastructure such as hotels, resorts, harbours and airports, could become stranded assets, especially in heavily affected coastal areas. For all destinations, disaster preparedness and management will become an increasingly important part of any destination's integrated management plans as climate-related disasters worsen," the hard hitting report says, warning least developed countries to adequately prepare as they are more vulnerable to extreme events than richer ones.

The report says the heritage sites have the potential to provide some of the best models and innovative examples of sustainable tourism due to their international designation and the resulting resources and attention they receive.

It says that the sites remain important to the future generations and as such sustainable and adaptive management strategies should be instituted to help make sites more resilient to climate change.

The 108-page report recognises the role that the indigenous and local populations have, saying their unique and valuable local knowledge, traditions and cultural practices that can contribute to effective management strategies in the face of rapid climatic change.

Unesco's director for world heritage center Mechthild Rössler says there is need to better understand, monitor and address climate change threats to World Heritage sites.

"As the report's findings underscore,

achieving the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global temperature rise to a level well below 2 degrees celsius is vitally important to protecting our World Heritage for current and future generations," she says.

Lead author of the report and deputy director of the Climate and Energy Programme at the Union of Concerned Scientists Adam Markham, said climate change is affecting World Heritage sites across the globe.

"World governments, the private sector and tourists all need to coordinate their efforts to reduce carbon emissions and to protect the world's most treasured cultural and natural resources from the impact

of tourism activities," Elisa Tonda, Unep's head of the Responsible Industry and Value Chains Unit, says.

"Policies to decouple tourism from natural resource impacts, carbon emissions and environmental harm will engage a responsible private sector and promote change in tourists' behaviour to realise the sectors' potential in some of the world's most visited places," she adds.

Because World Heritage sites must have "Outstanding Universal Value," the report recommends that the World Heritage Committee consider the risk of prospective sites become degraded by climate change before they add them to the list.



COMMENTARY

Is Kenya's tourism sector headed in the right direction?

BY PESACHECK

Should players in the hospitality industry be optimistic that the government is allocating resources to support its stated objective of increasing the number of international tourists? Is the optimism reflected in various media reports misplaced?

While the article correctly points out that the budgetary allocation towards the State Department for Commerce

and Tourism increased in 2015/2016 to Sh10.68 billion from Sh5.89 billion in 2014/2015, it overlooks two facts. The first being that the allocation specific to tourism development and promotion was actually Sh8.6 billion with the remaining Sh2 billion, allocated to trade development. Secondly, allocation to tourism development and promotion has since been slashed by 40 per cent to Sh5.15 billion shillings in the supplementary budget approved by Parliament in March.

Approved FY 14/15	Approved FY15/16	Supplementary Budget 15/16	FY 16/17 Estimates	Variance (btwn 2015/16 and 2016/17)
3.209	8.597	5.145	4.477	-4.119

In addition, the government has also proposed to allocate Sh4.477 billion to Tourism in FY 2016/2017, which is 48 per cent lower than the approved allocation at the onset of the current financial year. This difference mainly arises from the government's decision to slash the budget allocation to Tourism promotion and marketing by almost Sh4 billion.

The Tourism Department has also revised its targets of number of international tourists arrivals for the financial year 2015/2016 to two million from 2.5 million. It however, retained its targets of expected number of international tourists at 2.8 million in 2016/2017.

With a greatly reduced budget, this target seems unrealistic given that Kenya only received 1.18 million international visitors in 2015 despite the large marketing spend allocation.

The importance of tourism as a key forex earner for the country and a government priority, cannot be gainsaid. However, the decreased funding contradicts this notion and may not be adequate to revive the sector which has suffered numerous setbacks due to terrorism.

PesaCheck is the first-ever media-focused budget and public finance fact-checking initiative.

APART FROM THE BREATHTAKING HERITAGE SITES, KENYA IS ALSO THE HOME TO THE MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE AS WELL AS SPECIES

STORMING INTO TURBULENCE

DECLINING FUNDS FOR TOURISM

2015/16

APPROVED BUDGET

8.597

Billions of Shillings

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

2

International Visitors in millions

2016/17

BUDGET ESTIMATE

4.477

Billions of Shillings

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

2.8

Estimated International Visitors in millions

source pesacheck.org

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