



REPUBLIC OF GHANA

*UNWTO Regional Conference on Enhancing Brand Africa-
Fostering Tourism Development, Accra, Ghana,
17-19 August 2015*

Post-Conference Summary

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1. Overview and Purpose of this Document

This document provides a summary of the **purpose and conclusions** of the UNWTO Regional Conference on *'Enhancing Brand Africa – Fostering Tourism Development'*, organized by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts of Ghana, which took place in Accra, Ghana, from 17-19 August 2015 at the kind invitation of the Government of Ghana.

2. Background

Africa's Image

Africa's tourism, and thus the capacity of the tourism sector to contribute to the development of the continent, is often hindered by an unwarranted and disproportionately negative perception of Africa. This is exacerbated by the generalization of crises, whereby an event occurring in a specific location may be perceived internationally as much more widespread, thereby affecting the image not just of that country, but sometimes of the whole of Africa. This leads to inaccurate and damaging stereotypes impacting the entire continent, which can have a deleterious effect on Africa's image and, consequently, on tourism and its potential for economic development.

The effect of Ebola on the tourism sector in Africa in 2014 is a case in point. International tourist arrivals to Africa, which had been growing at an average of 5% a year in the previous two years, grew by only 2% in 2014, as a result of the impact of the misperception about the health risks. Countries nowhere near the location of outbreaks suffered because of this negative effect. However, most significantly, there are numerous positive stories in Africa that do not manage to reach a global audience and therefore fail to impact on international perceptions of the region – stories that could redress the imbalance of the current narrative that underpins a negative stereotype.

The Potential of Tourism

Tourism is one of Africa's most promising sectors in terms of development. In 2014, Africa received 56 million international tourists up from 26 million in 2000. International tourism receipts in Africa amount to US\$ 36 billion or 7% of all exports in the continent. Furthermore, Africa has a major opportunity to harness the potential of tourism to foster development, increase its participation in the global economy, and generate revenues for investment in other activities. In addition, tourism creates opportunities for millions of host communities in Africa and provides revenues for environmental conservation. Tourism also offers a powerful tool to project a positive image of Africa and thereby underpin community and economic development, as well as

conservation, throughout Africa. This, in turn, can also influence positive perceptions of Africa as a place to invest and study, which can further accelerate development.

For Africa to maximise the development potential of tourism, the positive aspects of Africa's story need to be disseminated and heard much more widely.

This entails a multi-stakeholders process that requires, among others, strong cooperation and enhancing capacity on issues of marketing and branding, including crisis communication. To this end, the Regional Conference on '*Enhancing Brand Africa – Fostering Tourism Development*' was organized jointly by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts of Ghana.

Conference Aims

The aims of the conference were to:

- Analyse the **status of Brand Africa** and its impact on tourism in the region;
- Identify the **key challenges** facing Brand Africa and that of African countries;
- **Exchange national experiences** on country branding and tourism branding;
- **Explore how African destinations can successfully build a strong brand** in an increasingly competitive marketplace and a constantly changing business environment;
- **Create synergies among African countries** towards greater cooperation in the promotion and positioning of a shared African tourism brand.

Key Questions

The five Conference sessions (programme attached) explored the following key questions:

- How can we change the African narrative to a more positive one?
- Branding is a concept widely used, but often misunderstood. It offers enormous potential for Africa, if done effectively. But, what is it and how can it help destinations become more competitive?
- How easy is it to do?
- Can it be done on a limited budget?
- How is this affected by the digital era?
- Can we raise Africa's profile by working together on a regional basis?
- What are the critical success factors involved in doing this?
- How do others do it and what can we learn from them?
- How to manage reputation in a volatile environment

3. Conclusions

The following conclusions emerged from conference debate:

3.1 Objective

Change the African narrative from a disproportionately negative stereotype to reflect the true and positive side of Africa, and thereby remove perceived barriers to development throughout Africa – using tourism to drive this change.

This is not about creating a new brand Africa (this already exists) – but to enhance the brand value of Africa and make sure that brand is strong enough to support tourism, making it one of the drivers of growth and development in the region.

Nor is it about a logo or a strapline. Rather, it is about each country identifying and conveying positive messages about their successes and strengths. Together, these will generate a critical mass of positive communications, which will contribute to a much more positive narrative about Africa as a whole.

A strong brand Africa will support tourism and tourism will support regional development.

3.2 Methodology

How can this be achieved?

Guiding Principle

Without denying existing challenges, Africa should focus on telling the **positive** side of its story to the world: how it is dynamic, progressive, vibrant, energetic, diverse, friendly, warm, cultural, creative, fashionable, smart and 'cool'- an economically, culturally, and environmentally great and diverse continent.

These are the stories that will redress the imbalance in Africa's image and convey the positive and true nature of Africa. This is primarily a narrative driven by the character of people all over Africa and how they contribute to this warm, vibrant, dynamic continent – not just in business, art and culture, but in everyday life.

Key Steps

1. **Africa needs to 'own the narrative':**

This is about African public sector, media and citizens making their voices heard, through positive stories. This will go some way to redressing the negative stereotypical imagery that is all too often portrayed by international media;

2. **Engage the immense potential of civil society, particularly women and youth:**

They will be key participants, as well as beneficiaries, in fostering this 'new narrative'.

3. **Embrace technology and use it to disrupt the negative African narrative and replace it with a positive narrative:**

Social and digital media offer an opportunity as never before. Africa can project its positive stories relatively cost-effectively to reach many more people worldwide than would ever have been remotely possible through traditional media. Individuals can contribute to this 'new' positive narrative – e.g.: #theAfricathemedianevershowyou: simple, inexpensive online campaign, but with inspiring content and global impact.

4. **Build strong bricks in the 'Africa brand wall':**

Africa is about strength in diversity – 54 countries in 1 continent. It is not about creating a single, artificial brand for the African continent. Rather it is about highlighting and combining the individual strengths and success stories of each African country to tell a bigger and more positive story about the continent as a whole.

5. **Regional cooperation will be critical:**

Enhanced regional cooperation, most especially on visas and air connectivity, is critical to advancing tourism in Africa. This will not only be important in enabling visitors to travel more easily between countries, but it will also send a clear message to potential investors that 'Africa is open for business'. And it will enhance the credibility of the 'new', positive African narrative.

6. **Build partnerships with the media, civil society and the private sector:**

The role of destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in today's world is to be a 'facilitator', a catalyst, and not so much an 'authority'. This requires DMOs, firstly, to understand the aspirations and concerns of a wide range of stakeholders, who are critical to the success of the African tourism economy; and, secondly, it requires DMOs to work with these stakeholders to overcome obstacles to development and maximise opportunities for sustainable growth.

7. **Target the right message to the right media:**

It is essential for countries to:

- Develop the most appropriate, positive messages about their assets, strengths and successes;
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- Tailor these messages to suit the targeted market segments;
- Elaborate and build upon these positive messages, so that they have a longer lifespan and can be communicated in different and innovative ways;
- Develop a communications plan to convey these messages – both directly through official channels, but also through 'brand ambassadors';
- Ensure these messages are targeted to the right media.

8. Stories are more powerful than official communications:

The media wants to hear 'stories' rather than institutional 'messages'. This means encouraging informal sources – from bloggers and 'instagrammers' to 'brand ambassadors' – to become involved in the 'new African narrative' and unearth, create and disseminate their own positive stories.

9. Be prepared for a crisis:

Crises are unpredictable. The damage they cause can be exacerbated by not being prepared. Therefore, minimising the impact of a crisis requires being prepared – with a clear communications and management plan. Failure to deal quickly and efficiently when a crisis strikes (and it will) can severely compound the damage.

10. Capacity-building is essential:

Professionalism comes with experience and training. Experience comes with time, whereas competence can begin to be developed relatively swiftly through training. Developing skills in branding is important, so that DMOs staff and stakeholders can understand:

- What a brand is and how valuable it can be;
- How branding can make a difference;
- How to manage a brand;
- How to apply branding principles with limited resources; and
- How they can contribute to changing the narrative by actions at a local/national level;

Finally

'Brand Africa' is **not a project**. It does not require a separate structure or stand-alone. It is about the values and positive elements of Africa.

It is not just about tourism; it is about governance and behaviour, presentation and communication, investment and immigration, culture and heritage - in short the way Africa thinks about Africa, the way it talks about Africa, and the way it communicate positive stories that add up to more than the sum of their individual parts.

These all need to be developed and nurtured, firstly, to provide a viable infrastructure for residents and, secondly, to underpin opportunities for tourism to develop sustainably.

To achieve this, building capacity is fundamental to accelerate a change in the image of Africa. Africa is both the driver and implementer of this new narrative.

4. Next Steps

In order to fulfil the objective of having a stronger image of Africa, and thus support tourism development in the region as one of its key socio-economic drivers, the conference endorsed the following proposals to take these conclusions forward:

- The conclusions of the this conference have been shared with the Ministers of Tourism of Africa meeting at the **UNWTO General Assembly in Colombia** in September 2015.
- UNWTO proposes the issue of enhancing Brand Africa to become as a **priority within the UNWTO Programme of Africa 2016-2017**.
- This programme could include actions such as **training of DMOS** in African countries on branding and communication and creating an **annual meeting of CEOs of National Tourism Organizations** from all over Africa.
- UNWTO will approach **partners** to support the development of this program.
- Finally, it is important to recognise that **Brand Africa exists**. What we now need to do is to enhance its value and ensure its effective implementation. We can only do this through partnerships – among Africa countries, between all tourism stakeholders, by engaging citizens, destinations and media. Regional cooperation and capacity-building will be critical throughout this process.