

**UNWTO REGIONAL CONFERENCE: STRENGTHENING BRAND AFRICA
FOR THE SWIFT RECOVERY OF THE TOURISM SECTOR**

**Windhoek, Namibia
from 14 to 16 June 2021**

CONCEPT NOTE

I- **Context**

Up until 2019, Tourism has been one of the fastest growing sectors of our time, generating income and creating jobs for millions of host communities, contributing towards poverty alleviation and accounting for a sizeable percentage of the GDP of national economies. In 2019, over 1.4 billion tourists travelled outside their countries' borders¹, a figure that translates into opportunities for many regions and countries where tourism is an important source of welfare.

In Africa, tourism is one of the most promising sectors in terms of development. In 2019 Africa recorded a 4,3% growth, bringing the international arrivals to 70 million while international tourism receipts amounted to US\$ 39 billion². 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 preservation.

Unfortunately, from the time in March 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic, the tourism and travel industry was immediately grinded to a halt. For the first time in history we experienced 96% travel restriction measures being imposed by several member states with the closure of borders. The pandemic has brought about a drastic global economic downturn which has resulted not only in numerous loss of lives but loss of jobs, closure of businesses with a major impact on the micro, small & medium enterprises (MSME's). Africa as a continent has not been spared the effects of this pandemic though, the recorded level of COVID cases were at the lowest from the outset of the pandemic. The border closures and travel restrictions especially from the source markets have further added to the drastic drop in international arrivals to the continent.

In addition, for a long time albeit the abundance of its natural attributes, its rich history, culture and the warm hospitality of its people, Africa suffers from negative perceptions and stereotypes. The generalization of crises in specific locations is often attributed to the entire continent. These negative perceptions are defining the image of the continent and impacting on tourism development. It is unfortunate that the positive and success stories are hardly getting through the international media.

² For more information, please consult: <https://www.unwto.org/global-and-regional-tourism-performance>

However, through the use of media and social media platforms, African countries can own the narrative to transform the current discourse and enhance Africa's image altogether.

In 2015, the UNWTO Regional Conference on Enhancing Brand Africa - Fostering Tourism Development which was held in Ghana, set the premises for key outputs to develop a strong Brand Africa. Consequently, the topic of Brand Africa is now included in the "**UNWTO Agenda for Africa - Tourism for Inclusive Growth**". This agenda serves as a blueprint to guide the work of UNWTO in Africa and it has been endorsed by the African Member States and subsequently approved by the 23rd session of the UNWTO General Assembly in St Petersburg, Russian Federation, in 2019.

Furthermore, given the immediate impact of the pandemic in 2020 through an online survey UNWTO revisited through its Regional Department for Africa the priorities of the agenda and key results that emerged, identified the following areas to be further strengthened: Unlocking Growth through Investment Promotion and Public Private Partnerships; Fostering Resilience (Safety + Security, Crisis Communication) and **Advocating the Brand Africa**.

Creating capacity in Africa to build and manage a strong image and brand, including crisis management is fundamental to build resilience in the tourism sector and foster its growth. Capacity of African Member states in regards to branding is variable. Even though some countries have an understanding of branding and an effective track record of implementation, the majority has limited experience – and therefore knowledge – of destination branding is necessary. Similarly their institutional capacity in financial and human resource terms is often also quite limited. For a continent as wide and diverse as Africa and in order to encompass the various perspectives and depict the multilayered reality, it is paramount to include through a proper branding exercise key stakeholders at the national level (ministries, National Tourism Organizations and private sector) to build an authentic image of their destinations.

Moreover, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in tourism are the building blocks allowing for positive environmental, social and economic impacts of tourism to be felt on a local level, and if managed responsibly – by mitigating the negative impacts, also on a national level. Their success is naturally linked to the attractiveness of a destination, and marketing skills are crucial for MSMEs to thrive in a competitive environment. With a sustainable approach to planning for tourism development, initiatives that empower small businesses with knowledge and skills to match the tourist markets' expectations and needs, and micro-credit loan schemes to help bring innovative and socially inclusive ideas to reality, MSMEs in tourism could slowly but surely create the foundations for a sustainable tourism sector across the continent.

Considered the biggest contributors of the tourism sector, MSMEs account for 80% of the region's employment³: empowering and improving skills and capabilities of young entrepreneurs deem crucial not only for the tourism sector in Africa but for the overall economy of the continent.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic UNWTO had predicted tourist numbers in Africa to reach 134 million by 2030, and these which have created opportunities for income generation at all levels of the value chain, the potential for tourism induced benefits for local businesses which even if with a downturn in international tourists arrivals cannot be ignored. Given the right and continued support, these enterprises can be catalysts for social inclusion, creating opportunities for low income people to work within or alongside the tourism sector.

II-Objectives of the regional conference

³ For more information, please consult: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/08/why-smes-are-key-to-growth-in-africa/>

The programme of activities of the conference will include presentations, interactive discussion sessions as well as technical visits which will be organized by the Government of Namibia , the host of the event.

The main objectives of the regional conference are to:

- I. Leverage tourism as a cross-cutting sector with high impact on national and regional branding to enhance the image of African destinations as the building blocks of the overall image of Africa;
- II. Engage the public and the private sectors as well as local communities and the diaspora in promoting positive stories and experiences about Africa, developing synergies between countries to further strengthen the positioning of the continent;
- III. Create and enhance destinations' capacity and skills on brand development and management; marketing, including social media and storytelling, and effective communication;
- IV. Create compelling stories, enhance MSMEs capacity and competitiveness.

- V. Understand the policy framework in place for SMEs to secure loans and facilitate access to capital and leverage business performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

III-Audience

- Officials from Tourism Ministries, National Tourism Organizations and Destination Management Organizations
- Stakeholders from the public, private sector, civil society and the diaspora working on Brand management and Image Branding
- Representatives of the media including social media platforms