

**The First Ordinary Session of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on
Transport, Intercontinental and Interregional Infrastructures, Energy and Tourism**

THEME: Financing Infrastructure in Africa

Harmonisation of Tourism Strategy in Africa

I. Background

1. The potential of tourism to transform and develop the African continent is fully recognized at international and continental level. The AU/NEPAD Tourism Action plan (2004) recognizes tourism as one of the sector with the greatest potential to contribute to the economic regeneration of the continent, particular through the diversification of African economies and generation of foreign exchange earnings. The AU/NEPAD Africa Action Plan (2010-2015) further identifies tourism as one of the key sectors to advance regional and continental integration in Africa. In order to achieve this, the Action plan among other strategic objectives identified the need for creating an enabling regulatory environment, strengthen institutional capacity, promote tourism marketing and promote research and development. In line with this, a number of African countries and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have identified tourism as a priority sector and over the years they have designed and implemented strategies with varying levels of success.
2. However, despite of the existence of AU action plans, Member States and REC's have continued to operate in isolation of each other. There is no guiding framework under which national and regional strategies are developed and as a result the continent is faced with varying strategies that are not harmonised into a common continental strategy.

II. Findings/Progress/Implementation

3. In realisation of its potential for economic growth and development, there is increased interest and support from African countries and RECs towards the development of the tourism sector. In view of this and the fact that the continent is yet to realise its full tourism potential, a harmonised continental strategy would necessary. Across the continent a number of Member States and RECs have formulated tourism development instruments. The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), for example, is now in the process of implementing a ten year sustainable tourism master plan that was officially launched by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta in 2013, while the Common Market for Easter and Southern Africa (COMESA) has also developed a Sustainable Tourism Development Framework.¹ In addition, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) has established an institutional framework – RETOSA (Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa) to coordinate and boost tourism in the region. Despite the availability of plans with well-designed strategies, most of them have not been fully implemented due to a number of challenges as later explained in section 3.0. This implies that a continental strategy will equally be negatively affected if the strategies at national and regional are weak.

III. Challenges

4. In spite of the various methods to ensure a harmonised tourism approach at regional and continental level, Africa still faces disjointed tourism strategies. This has been as a result of a number of challenges (outlined below) which the AU Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Energy, Transport and Tourism need to critical analyse. The challenges include:

¹<http://comesabusinesscouncil.org/comesabusinesscouncil/sites/all/themes/bluez/documents/COMESA%20Sustainable%20Tourism%20Development%20Framework/COMESA%20Sustainable%20Tourism%20Development%20Framework.pdf>

- i. There are weak institutional structures and limited capacity to implement strategies at national level which in turn have a weak feed into the regional and later continental strategy
- ii. Limited coordination between the various REC's – regions are developing and implementing harmonised tourism strategies which presents a challenge of combining them into one continental strategy
- iii. Limited operationalization of the AU/NEPAD Tourism Action Plan
- iv. Limited research on the nature and structure of the tourism industry at continental level

IV. Issues to be discussed by STC experts

- 5. Given the high potential of tourism to transform and contribute to the development of Africa, it is by no doubt very important to have a harmonised planning approach at continental level. Therefore, at a continental level there is need to discuss the key tourism issues at regional and continental level and lay strategies to address the challenges faced in the process of harmonising tourism strategies.
- 6. The following are the key issues that are brought to the attention of the STC experts – with corresponding questions;
 - i. AU/NEPAD Tourism Action Plan (2004) – to what extent has the action plan enabled the harmonisation of tourism strategies in Africa?
 - ii. Harmonisation of tourism strategies – What are the critical success factors for attaining harmonised tourism plans, policies and strategies in Africa?
 - iii. National and regional tourism strategies - what is the status of tourism planning at national and regional level?
 - iv. Variance in strategies - What aspects of the various national and regional strategies are at variance and therefore need harmonisation?
 - v. Good practices – how have other regions and REC's across the world harmonised tourism strategies? What lessons can Africa learn from them?

V. Recommendations/Way Forward

- 7. Based on the challenges and key issues raised, the following recommends are made:
 - i. There is need to evaluate the implementation of the AU/NEPAD Tourism Action plan and assess extent to which it has facilitated harmonisation of tourism policies and strategies

- ii. The critical success factors for attaining a harmonised tourism planning approach in Africa should be identified and these should inform the formulation of an operationalization strategy for the Tourism action plan
- iii. A review of RECs across the world should be carried out to identify learning lessons and good practices that Africa could adopt
- iv. As a means of ensuring harmonisation, there is need to develop tourism policy and strategy guidelines that countries and RECs can follow when revising existing plans and policies or designing new ones to ensure that they are aligned to the continental strategy
- v. To address challenge of weak institutional structures at national and regional level, there is to design and implement a capacity building mechanism
- vi. Detailed research is required to identify the key factors that can stimulate intra African tourism integration and collaboration. There is need to develop Trans-national tourism products and marketing strategies that will encourage more tourist inflows and enhance higher trickle down effects across the continent

VI. Conclusion

- 8. Africa's tourism development prospects are promising and the sector has high potential that has not yet been fully tapped. The under development of the tourism sector in Africa is as a result of a number of factors and key among them is uncoordinated and unharmonised approach. Although a number of action plans have put in place to try and resolve this, they have had limited success due to a number of challenges. Therefore there is need for a harmonised strategic tourism planning framework for Africa that will not only provide a common strategy platform, but will enable the continent galvanise national and regional tourism initiatives and tap into the vast tourism opportunities.