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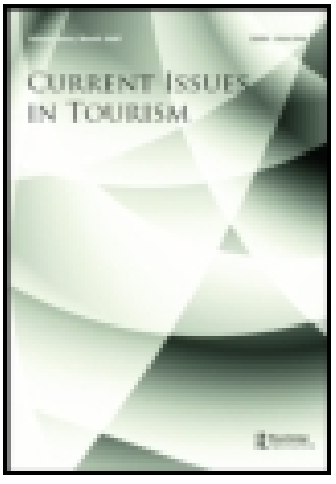


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# From Davos, Switzerland to Mombasa, Kenya: a position paper on the adoption of the 'Davos declaration' by hotels

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## RESEARCH LETTER

# From Davos, Switzerland to Mombasa, Kenya: a position paper on the adoption of the 'Davos declaration' by hotels

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Climate change has been identified as a major challenge in the achievement of sustainable development especially for developing countries like Kenya. There has been a wide acknowledgement that there is a need for long-term strategies for the industry players to reduce their contribution to climate change in line with other industries. Industries and societal sectors have sought ways of mitigating the causes of climate change. The Second International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, held in Davos, Switzerland, on 3 October 2007, provided practical guidelines for the industry in response to climate change. This paper seeks to evaluate the adoption of the 'Davos Declaration' among selected Mombasa hotels in terms of water, energy and waste management. Results indicate that despite wide knowledge among hoteliers on the impacts of climate change and the role hotels can play in its mitigation, most hoteliers are slow in adopting the mitigation measures.

**Keywords:** tourism; climate change; mitigation; tourism operators; Kenya

## 1. Introduction

Climate change is a major development challenge in the twenty-first century and beyond. Tourism is both a vector and a victim of climate change. Tourism continues to be majorly impacted by climate change considering its sensitivity to weather, climate and dependence on natural flora and fauna which forms the core of tourism business. Despite tourism being a 'victim' of climate change, it is also a 'vector' contributing to greenhouse gases (GHGs). Research indicates that tourism contributes 5% of total global $CO_2$ and it is expected to grow significantly by 2035 (Simpson, Gössling, Scott, Hall, & Gladin, 2008). Therefore, the industry's contribution of GHG cannot be overlooked; hence there is a need for long-term strategy for the industry to reduce the emission of GHG associated with the industry in line with other industries (Simpson et al., 2008).

The 'Second International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism', held in Davos, Switzerland, in October 2007, acknowledged the reality of climate change and its inter-relationship with tourism. The conference called upon governments, industry and consumers among other players to prioritize on 'green actions'. The 'declaration' provides specifications for all stakeholders including governments and international institutions, industry and destinations, consumer and research community. For the purpose of this research, 'industry and destination' call for green action will be of interest. Davos call

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was succeeded by the development of guidelines that are more practical and more applicable for the industry captured in the report on *Climate change adaptation and mitigation in the tourism sector: Frameworks, tools and practices* by Simpson et al. (2008). These tools provide practical guidelines for the industry in response to climate change involving four key steps.

Step 1: Eliminate: eliminate the emission of GHGs by keeping away from certain activities that can be avoided without a considerable change to the tourism product or service quality.
Step 2: Reduce: the second is to reduce the emission of GHGs by focusing on energy efficiency practices in specific activities.
Step 3: Substitute: the third step is to substitute practices that are responsible for a large amount of GHG emissions with practices that have a lower carbon footprint.
Step 4: Offset: finally, the institution or business unit can offset remaining emissions to achieve full carbon neutrality.

These guidelines form the basis for this research.

### 1.1. *Conceptual framework for climate change mitigation*

While the tourism sector contributes immensely to global carbon emission, the notion of carbon 'neutral' operation has been popularized both in the literature and policy papers. The concept of carbon 'neutral' refers to all efforts including mitigation strategies, policies and activities aimed at reducing organizations' carbon contribution (Simpson et al., 2008). This process is conceptualized under four proposed steps suggested by Simpson et al. (2008) (Figure 1). These processes do not follow any particular sequence but are interrelated.

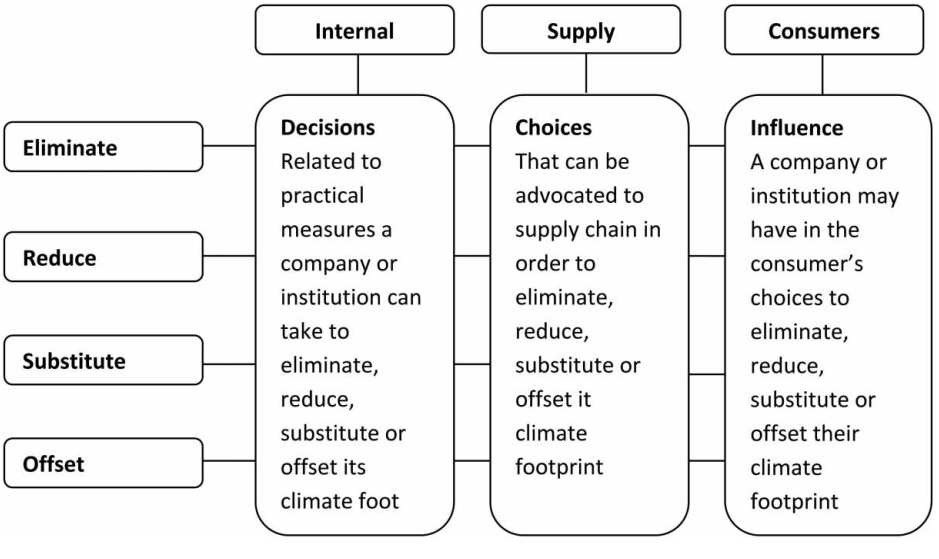


Figure 1. Four steps to carbon neutrality for businesses and institutions.
Source: Simpson et al. (2008).

## 2. Methodology

A survey was carried out on climate change and green practices among Kenyan hoteliers. The study focused on accommodation facilities listed in the Mombasa and Coast Tourism Association directory and local business directory. A simple stratified sampling method was used to reach a sample of 47 establishments. A total of 175 questionnaires were sent out and 74 fully filled questionnaires were returned representing a 42.3% response rate. The respondents comprised management staff from international tourist hotels, local chain and independent hotels, standard tourist hotels, guest houses and tourist apartments located in the coastal city of Mombasa, Kenya. Among the respondents were 21 front office managers, 10 food and beverage managers, 9 sales and marketing managers, 14 resident managers, 7 general managers and 13 housekeeping managers (Table 1).

The questionnaire survey was conducted between January and November 2013 to evaluate overall awareness, attitudes and general green undertakings by the establishments. The questionnaire variables were drawn from stakeholder guidelines proposed including adoption of environmental management systems (EMS), reduction of energy use and use of renewable energy, energy sources, reduction in the use of materials and recycling, sourcing food for restaurants, construction and communication of green action to stakeholders (see Simpson et al., 2008, for detailed recommendations).

Accommodation facilities were categorized as international hotels (11%), local chain hotels (9%), international independent (10%), local chain hotels (16%) local independent (41%) and others (18%) (including holiday apartments and guest houses). The star ratings were also considered: 19% were one star, 22% two star, 16% three star, 17% four star, 8% five star and 18% unrated accommodation establishments.

## 3. Results and findings

### 3.1. *Climate change awareness*

The existence of climate change was agreed by nearly all respondents (94%). When they were asked on their personal understanding of climate change, their responses were split between ‘increased global temperature levels’ (51%) and ‘unpredicted changes of weather’ (43%). Most respondents (75%) believed that climate change is affecting and/or will affect their business operations in the long run. However, 13% of the respondents had contrary views, while 10% did not know if climate change had or will ever have an effect on their business operations. Their attitude towards the effect of climate change was also evaluated and the results are shown in Table 2. Respondents were asked to what extent they believe that climate is/will affect your operation on a Likert scale of

Table 1. Respondents profile.

| Department | Frequency | Per cent | Valid per cent | Cumulative per cent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Front office managers | 21 | 28.4 | 28.4 | 28.4 |
| Food and beverage managers | 10 | 13.5 | 13.5 | 41.9 |
| Sales and marketing manager | 9 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 54.1 |
| Resident managers | 14 | 18.9 | 18.9 | 73.0 |
| General managers | 7 | 9.5 | 9.5 | 82.4 |
| Housekeeping managers | 13 | 17.6 | 17.6 | 100 |
| Total | 74 | 100 | | |

Table 2. Perceptions of climate change.

| Attitude | Frequency | Per cent | Valid per cent | Cumulative per cent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly believe | 15 | 20.27 | 20.27 | 20.27 |
| Believe | 23 | 31.08 | 31.08 | 51.35 |
| Don't know | 16 | 21.62 | 21.62 | 72.97 |
| Don't believe | 10 | 13.51 | 13.51 | 86.49 |
| Strongly don't believe | 5 | 6.757 | 6.757 | 93.24 |
| Non-response | 5 | 6.757 | 6.757 | 100 |
| Total | 74 | 100 | 100 | |



1–5 with 5 representing 'Strongly believe', 3 representing 'Don't know' and 1 'Strongly don't believe'.

This research sought to report on the adoption of guidelines that give advice to hotel operators on how to mitigate climate change. The Davos guidelines were developed to advise hoteliers on simple practical measures that industry players can adopt to mitigate climate change. Questions were posed regarding these guidelines and reported as follows:

(a) Adoption of EMS
The adoption of EMS by the establishments was low with a majority (97%) of the respondents indicating that their establishments had not adopted an EMS and further had limited knowledge of what EMS is. Only 2% of the respondents indicated that their establishments had adopted an EMS though their understanding of what they referred to as EMS was not clear.

(b) Reduction of energy use and use of renewable energy
Results indicate that reduction in energy use was one of the areas that operators had concentrated more. Majority (92%) of the respondents confirmed that they had policies and practices that were aimed at reducing energy use within their facilities. The use of electronic key cards was the most used method alongside other methods such as 'sensor systems for lighting and heating', educating staff, use of 'switch of the light' signs and educating guests through 'welcome letters', among others.

(c) Energy sources
Majority of the respondents indicated that their major source of energy (77%) was the national electricity grid in conjunction with other sources such as solar systems which were used by some operators (15%). However, since the country is frequently hit by energy shortage leading to power rationing, operators always resort to standby generators that are powered by fossil fuels (Table 3).

Table 3. An analysis of green actions.

| Green actions | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|---|---|---|
| (a) Adoption of EMS | 2 | 97 |
| (b) Reduction of energy use and use of renewable energy policy | 92 | 8 |
| (c) Green energy sources | 15 | 85 |
| (d) Reduction in the use of materials and recycling | 9 | 91 |
| (e) Sourcing food for the restaurants locally | 100 | 0 |
| (f) Constructions | 5 | 95 |
| (g) Communication of green action to stakeholders | 15 | 85 |

(d) Reduction in the use of materials and recycling
Recommendations on waste reduction include reduction of material use including replacing soap containers with soap dispensers, avoiding one-way butter and/or jam, use of clean water dispensers and changing dirty linen less frequently among other measures. With regard to the above measures, majority (91%) of respondents indicated that their establishments did not implement any of the above measures. Their argument was that these measures do not promote high standards of hygiene and would compromise guests' comfort; hence, they were avoided at all costs. Procedures in the housekeeping department emphasized on replenishing guests' rooms with clean linen on a daily basis, while selling bottled water by the establishments was seen as a way of boosting sales in the restaurants.

(e) Sourcing food for the restaurants
The Davos guidelines further encourage hospitality operators to use locally produced food supplies among other kitchen practices that would help in the reduction of energy among other benefits. Results indicate that all establishments source their food from the local community and within the country.

(f) Constructions
Majority (95%) of the facilities were over 20 years old and operators at the time of construction had not considered development of structures and facilities that would promote resource efficiency especially in terms of energy efficiency. An example is the construction of big windows and transparent roofs at the restaurants and other public places that would maximize the use of natural ventilation which were not visible in most of the establishments. Respondents were asked on whether their management had ever considered renovations that would improve on natural lighting and ventilation. Majority (45%) of the respondents did not have near future plans for such structural improvements, while only 5% did have plans for such improvements.

(g) Communication of green action to stakeholders
Communicating green action is viewed as a way to promote sustainable behaviours among clients and employees of accommodation facilities. The study found that very few operators have championed communicating green action. Less than 15% of the respondents indicated that they educate their employees and guests on green behaviours. However, those respondents who do communicate green action consider the use of welcome letters and signs to educate and/or advice their customers on green issues, while training of employees on resource use has been considered as one of the tools used to pass the message. Corporate social responsibility has also been considered as one of the avenues that green action can be communicated. Some operators have gone a mile ahead to include reporting on resource use within their facilities in their annual reports. This was evidenced as few respondents (3%) do report on their resource use, while majority (34%) confirmed that they do not report while the rest either did not know or did not respond to the question. The study also sought to establish the existence of future strategic plans in the establishment in line with greening action. Only a few (9%) respondents indicated that their establishments had put in place strategic plans on energy, water and waste reduction, while 34% of the respondent said that their establishments did not have any strategic plan. Majority of the respondents (47%) indicated that their establishments had not made any strategic plans. Most respondents (58%) were of the opinion that the government was not doing enough to support green initiatives, while only 15% believed that the government showed commitment to support green initiatives in the region.

## 4. Discussion and conclusion

The Davos declaration marked the start for the engagement of the tourism industry in climate change response to climate change matters, and the importance of addressing the industry's contribution to climate change was underscored. Although the declaration provided a list of policy recommendations, it found little relevance to hotel operations. Further development of guidelines and tools by Simpson et al. (2008) gave recommendations that were more specific for the industry with practical lessons for hoteliers as discussed above to include: eliminating emissions, reducing waste by focusing on efficiency, substituting and offsetting remaining emissions as discussed in the introduction. However, such recommendations have found both policy and action challenges which is common for tourism, and research also acknowledges the gap between awareness and action (McKercher & Prideaux, 2011). This scenario is evident for the case of Mombasa where very little has been done by both the government and the hospitality industry in addressing climate change.

The results of this study indicate moderate awareness of climate change among hoteliers in Mombasa, along the Kenyan coast. Hoteliers also acknowledge climate change as a reality with possible effects on their operations. However, this research reports on limited mitigation actions. While adaptation has been proposed for industry stakeholder in order to cope with climate change impacts, mitigation of GHGs must be done to cut industry's contribution of global GHGs stocks (Simpson et al., 2008). Some recommendations are available including construction of energy-efficient buildings, use of energy-efficient heating and cooling systems, local sourcing, recycling, waste management, use of technology and behaviour change, among others (Scott, Hall, & Gössling, 2012). Furthermore, a number of good practice and practical applications can be found in the *Frameworks, tools and practices* proposed by Simpson et al. (2008). The aftermath of the Davos declaration have seen some countries, destinations and regions implement mitigation strategies. There are a number of studies especially in OECD countries reporting on how different countries are implementing mitigation strategies both at national and organizational levels (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).

Finally, it is worthwhile to mention there is a challenge of doing an evaluative research on the adoption of Davos guidelines. This is because there is lack of a framework to do such an evaluation; hence, it is hard for researchers to benchmark their findings. However, the findings were able to give a general picture on the adoption of guidelines and tools for cutting GHG as proposed by Simpson et al. (2008).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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