Making Kenya's hospitality globally competitive
KENYA ASSOCIATION OF HOTEL KEEPERS AND CATERERS

Report of the

22ND KAHC ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM & GOLF TOURNAMENT

THEME

Sustainable Tourism Growth For Global Excellence

25th – 27th June 2026

Diamonds Malindi and Malindi Golf & Country Club

Sponsors of the
22nd KAHC Annual Symposium & Golf Tournament

National Social Security Fund - NSSF

Tourism Fund

BOMA International Hospitality College – BIHC

Safaricom

DSTV

Brookside Dairy Ltd

Utalii Hotel

International Hotel & Tourism Institute - IHTI

Table of Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BIHC	Boma International Hospitality College
BMU	Beach Management Unit
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CECM	County Executive Committee Member
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMA	Capital Markets Authority
COTU	Central Organisation of Trade Unions (Kenya)
DStv	Digital Satellite Television (MultiChoice)
ELRC	Employment and Labour Relations Court
eTIMS	Electronic Tax Invoice Management System
FKE	Federation of Kenya Employers
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTRCMC	Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre
HR	Human Resources
ID4Africa	Identity for Africa (conference)
ILO	International Labour Organization
JKIA	Jomo Kenyatta International Airport
KAHC	Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers
KCB	Kenya Commercial Bank
KFS	Kenya Forest Service
KICC	Kenyatta International Convention Centre
KMA	Kenya Maritime Authority
KPA	Kenya Ports Authority
KRA	Kenya Revenue Authority
KTB	Kenya Tourism Board
KUC	Kenya Utalii College
KUDHEIHA	Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
LLP	Limited Liability Partnership
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council (South Africa)
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
POS	Point of Sale
PS	Principal Secretary
RBA	Retirement Benefits Authority
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SRC	Salaries and Remuneration Commission
TCMU	Tourism Crisis Management Unit
TF	Tourism Fund
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAT	Value Added Tax
WEF	World Economic Forum

Executive Summary

The 22nd Annual Symposium and Golf tournament of the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers (KAHC) convened on 25th – 27th June 2026 at Diamonds, Malindi and Malindi Golf and Country Club — the first time the Symposium has been held in this region — under the theme *Sustainable Tourism Growth for Global Excellence*.

Mike Macharia, Chief Executive Officer of KAHC, welcomed delegates to what he described as a fresh chapter for the Association, and urged every participant to leave the Symposium with at least one concrete, achievable commitment to pursue through to 2027.

Christopher Musau, KAHC National Chairman, in his opening remarks welcomed the government's KES 14.3 billion Tourism Fund allocation but flagged the absence of exchequer funding for tourism agencies including Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) and Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC) as a serious gap. He formally opposed the proposed Ebola quarantine facility in Nanyuki, and called for fuel subsidies and stronger sustainability practice across the sector. He closed by announcing that KAHC's ten-year strategic plan is ongoing and that the Association is rebranding, with a formal launch of its new logo and organisational name to follow in the coming months.

The Keynote Address was delivered by Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok, Principal Secretary, State Department of Tourism. Delivering the Keynote on behalf of Cabinet Secretary Hon. Rebecca Miano, Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife, Amb. Prof. Bitok confronted delegates with the hard truth that Kenya's tourist arrivals have barely doubled since 2006 while Dubai grew eight-fold, and challenged the room to identify the one lever that could double arrivals within six months. He called on industry to diversify beyond beach and safari, build the capacity to host large international events, and treat digitisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption as a competitive necessity. In the plenary discussion that followed, he addressed the issues raised by participants — spanning air access and open skies, the delayed Malindi Airport upgrade, government's Ebola-free messaging, gender balance within his Department, and the long-standing Diani Road infrastructure concern. In response to these issues, Amb. Prof. Bitok made a series of government and personal commitments in response.

Following the Keynote, the Symposium proceeded across a series of thematic sessions addressed by distinguished speakers and partner organisations from government, industry, academia and the private sector — covering AI adoption (Dr Joseph Sevilla, Strathmore University), the Finance Act 2026 (Robert Waruiru, Ichiban Tax), regenerative tourism (Prof. Colin Johnson, San Francisco State University), destination resilience (Dr Albert Kariuki, The Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre (GTRCMC) Eastern Africa), skills and human capital (Patrick Kimamo, Boma International Hospitality College

(BIHC)), executive wellbeing (Dr Stephen Wahome), tourism financing (David Mwangi, Tourism Fund (TF)), social dialogue (Jacqueline Mugo, Federation of Kenya Employee's (FKE)), social security compliance (Nelson Tonui, National Social Security Fund (NSSF)), and coastal tourism policy (Mohamed Osman Ali, Mombasa County CECM). Platinum partner DStv Business addressed delegates directly, presenting its case for premium content as a revenue-generating asset and spotlighting the live FIFA World Cup 2026 as an immediate commercial opportunity for the sector. Fellow Platinum partner Brookside Dairy also addressed delegates, presenting a partnership offer built around guaranteed supply, contract pricing and nationwide distribution; towards the 2026 Symposium, Brookside presented KAHC with a cheque of KES 1 million.

The Government Commitments and Key Recommendations below are a compilation drawn from across both days of the Symposium — the Keynote and its plenary discussion, and the thematic sessions that followed — rather than from any single session.

Government Commitments

1. Policy reform — championing all policy changes necessary to make Kenya's tourism sector work.
2. MICE positioning — bidding for international conferences across all major tourism hubs, not Nairobi alone.
3. Air access — consulting further on open skies and reverting to industry with a clear position.
4. Ronald Ngala Utalii College — working to open the College for its first student intake by September 2026.
5. Malindi Airport — consulting on the runway upgrade, contingent on resolving air access first.
6. Ebola messaging — confirming surveillance at all points of entry and carrying the message that Kenya is Ebola-free.
7. Gender balance — championing a 50-50 gender balance in the State Department of Tourism's senior leadership.

Key Recommendations to Industry

The following is a selection of the strongest, most actionable recommendations to emerge from the Symposium; the wider set of recommendations, by session, is set out in the main report.

1. Review withholding tax practices immediately — from 1 July 2026, failure to withhold exposes a business to the principal tax even where the recipient has already accounted for it, creating real exposure to being taxed twice on the same transaction.
2. Use the tax amnesty window before it closes on 31 December 2026 — outstanding tax liabilities settled by that date qualify for a full waiver of penalties and interest.
3. Register and formalise NSSF coverage for casual and seasonal workers — closing the sector's roughly 40% compliance gap before the ongoing Supreme Court process forces a harder reckoning.

4. Ensure your property has a digital presence AI booking agents can query, and pilot a WhatsApp booking bot for 24-hour reservations — without this, a property risks being invisible to the growing number of travellers planning trips through AI.
5. Set aside a dedicated training budget line and commission a skills-gap assessment with a training partner such as BIHC, rather than treating people development as an afterthought to capital investment.
6. Pursue certification under an internationally recognised sustainability framework — EarthCheck, Green Destinations, Green Key, or the East Africa certification scheme — as a concrete, verifiable step on the regenerative tourism journey.

Welcome Address

By Mr Mike Macharia
Chief Executive Officer, Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers (KAHC)

Mr Mike Macharia opened the 22nd Annual Symposium of the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers (KAHC), welcoming delegates, partners, government representatives and industry leaders to what he described as an important gathering for Kenya's hospitality sector.

He noted that the 2026 Symposium marked a notable milestone: the first of the Association's 22nd editions to be held in Malindi. All previous editions had been held in Mombasa and Diani, with the sole exception of one convened in Nairobi in 2003. The decision to convene in Malindi, he said, represented a fresh chapter for the Association and for the broader coastal hospitality industry.

Setting the tone for the two days ahead, Macharia urged every participant to leave the Symposium with at least one concrete, achievable commitment — and to pursue it with purpose through to 2027.

Introduction and Welcome Remarks

By Mr Christopher Musau
KAHC National Chairman

Mr Christopher Musau opened the 22nd KAHC Annual Symposium by welcoming delegates, partners and government representatives to the occasion. He thanked Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok, Principal Secretary, State Department of Tourism for his support and for accepting to deliver the Symposium's Keynote Address. He also extended his appreciation to the county and national government officials in attendance for their continued partnership with KAHC.

Musau then introduced the following KAHC Board Members in attendance:

1. Cathrine Murage — National Treasurer
2. Sven Kampa — Coast Region Chairman
3. Maureen Obunga — Kilifi Region Chairman
4. Wasike Wasike — Heritage Hotels
5. Dr Florence Njau — Nairobi Region Chairman

Turning to Kenya's national budget, Musau acknowledged the government's allocation of KShs 14.3 billion to the Tourism Fund — earmarked to stimulate sector growth and job creation — as a welcome commitment. However, he raised a pointed concern: Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) and the Kenya International Convention Centre (KICC) as well as other tourism agencies had received no exchequer allocation in the same budget. Given that tourism is a key pillar of the economy and that marketing and promotion rely heavily on these agencies, he cautioned that the omission would have serious implications for sector growth and urged the government to re-examine the proposal.

Musau reported that the sector had delivered strong results in 2025 despite global uncertainties: international tourist arrivals reached 2.7 million, up from 2.47 million in 2024, while domestic tourism stood at 5.2 million travellers. He maintained, however, that more must be done — air capacity into Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) and Moi International Airport (MIAM) must be increased, convention centres must be built in Nairobi and along the Coast, and destination marketing must be strengthened.

He raised the recently announced proposal to establish an Ebola quarantine facility in Kenya, describing it as posing significant risks to tourism and hospitality. He argued that even with rigorous safety protocols in place, the mere presence of such a facility would create a perception of vulnerability — deterring tourists, business travellers, conference organizers, and investors, and leading to booking cancellations and revenue losses across hotels, restaurants, and transport operators. The hospitality sector, he stated, formally opposes the establishment of the facility whilst acknowledging the importance of public health preparedness, and advocates for solutions that safeguard both public health and the economic interests of the industry.

Addressing the Symposium theme — Sustainable Tourism Growth for Global Excellence — Musau was unequivocal: sustainable tourism is no longer optional. He called on hospitality leaders to move sustainability beyond policy documents into everyday operations, covering energy efficiency, waste reduction, water conservation, sustainable sourcing, and green infrastructure. Sustainability, he added, is equally about people — empowering local communities, supporting small enterprises, ensuring decent work, and investing in skills, youth, and gender inclusion.

He identified rising fuel and energy costs as one of the most pressing operational challenges facing the industry, with knock-on effects on transportation, food supply chains, and service delivery — costs that inevitably pass through to consumers. He called on the government to consider fuel subsidies for the sector. At the same time, he reframed the energy challenge as an opportunity: investments in solar, biogas, and energy-efficient systems are, he argued, sound business decisions as much as environmental ones.

Musau closed by announcing that KAHC's ten-year strategic plan is ongoing and that the Association is rebranding, with a formal launch of the new logo and organisational name to follow in the coming months.

> Sustainable tourism is no longer an option; it is a must. Sustainability must transcend beyond policy documents and into every operational culture" tor around."
> *— Mr Christopher Musau, National Chairman, KAHC*

The Chairman's Key Requests:

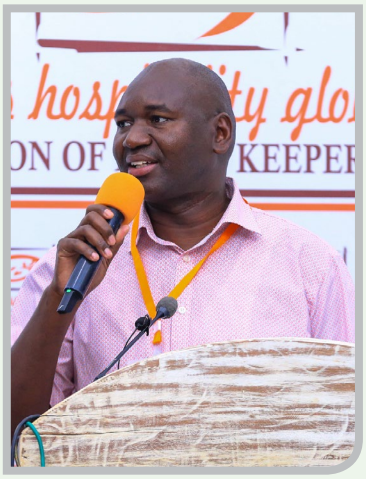
To Government	To the Industry & Stakeholders
• Reinstate exchequer allocations to tourism agencies including KTB and KICC, whose marketing and promotion mandates are central to sector growth. • Reconsider the proposed Ebola quarantine facility and adopt public health solutions that do not undermine Kenya's reputation as a safe destination. • Introduce fuel subsidies to cushion hospitality businesses from rising operational costs. • Develop incentives and financing frameworks for the sector's transition to renewable energy. • Prioritise investment in air capacity at JKIA and MIAM, and in convention centre infrastructure in Nairobi and at the Coast.	• Move sustainability from policy documents into everyday operational culture — energy, waste, water, sourcing, and green infrastructure. • Invest in renewable energy as a business imperative: lower costs, reduced exposure to fuel price volatility, and stronger global market positioning. • Invest in people — skills development, youth empowerment, gender inclusion, and fair labour practices — as the foundation of global excellence. • Engage with KAHC's ten-year strategic plan and participate in the forthcoming launch of the new logo and organisational identity. • Move from conversation to measurable action and commit to building a sector that future generations will be proud to inherit.

Keynote Address

By Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok

Principal Secretary State Department of Tourism – Delivered on behalf of Chief Guest, **Hon. Rebecca Miano***, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife*

Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok opened by conveying greetings from Cabinet Secretary Hon. Rebecca Miano, who had reached him by phone that morning with a message of goodwill for the industry's captains. He said he was delighted to be part of the 22nd KAHC Annual Symposium, noting candidly that he remained fairly new to the tourism sector — this being only his second such event since taking office, having accepted KAHC's invitation after Mike Macharia and Cathrine Murage visited his office the previous week.



He commended the Association for convening around the theme Sustainable Tourism Growth for Global Excellence, calling it timely and reflective of government's own intention to position Kenya as a leading, globally competitive tourist destination. Tourism, he affirmed, remains a vital pillar of the economy — a major employer of young people and among the country's leading foreign exchange earners — and he reassured delegates of government's commitment to partnering with industry to make the country more competitive and more attractive to visitors from within and beyond its borders.

On sustainability specifically, he pointed to a raft of reforms underway as the sector continues its post-COVID recovery: promoting sustainable tourism practices that protect natural and cultural resources while ensuring local communities benefit directly. He argued that Kenya has, for far too long, relied on only two products — beach and safari — and that it is time to diversify. He identified several under-tapped opportunities around tourism: sports tourism, given Kenya's global reputation as home to the world's fastest athletes; cultural tourism, drawing on the country's rich diversity of communities; MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions); shopping tourism; health and medical tourism; and agri-tourism, building on Kenya's agricultural strength.

Digitisation, he said, is another priority reform area — government intends to lean further into technology, and, with the world moving decisively toward AI, he urged the sector not to be left behind. On capacity building, he confirmed that Ronald Ngala Utalii College is being readied to welcome its first student intake, alongside continued support for private-sector training and capacity building within government agencies themselves — capacity he linked directly to government's ability to market, regulate, supervise and manage the sector effectively. He added that government continues to court investment into the sector, on the basis that new investment — whether regional or international — translates directly into jobs and opportunity for young Kenyans.

Turning to MICE, Bitok was direct: Kenya must position itself to bid for and host international events year-round, not only in Nairobi. He cited Kenya's hosting of the ID4Africa conference in 2023 — an event drawing some 5,000 international delegates — as evidence of the country's potential, noting that organisers had confirmed only five African countries were capable of hosting such an event: Morocco, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt. Having completed a five-country rotation, ID4Africa intends to return to Kenya a second time in 2027. With the BOMAS International Cultural Centre coming on stream, he said, Kenya should be pursuing back-to-back international events — filling hotels and facilities not just in Nairobi, but in Mombasa and elsewhere around the country. He put the challenge back to industry squarely: if Kenya bid today for an event bringing 1,000 paying international delegates, where — outside Nairobi and Mombasa — could it actually be hosted? Building that capacity, he argued, is as much industry's responsibility as government's.

He then confronted the room with the numbers behind his urgency. Kenya's current tourist arrivals stand at 2.7 million — barely double the 1.5 million recorded in 2006, over a period in which Dubai, starting from a comparable base, grew eight-fold, and South Africa alone added 2 million tourists in a single year. At the present rate of growth, he warned, Kenya risks still sitting at around 2 million arrivals by 2050. He challenged delegates directly: what is that one thing Kenya could do to double arrivals — from 2.7 million to 5.4 million — within six months? Even a more modest ambition, he suggested — reaching 1 million additional visitors between now and December, matching South Africa's single-year addition — would require identifying that one decisive lever, rather than waiting for it to happen by chance.

He was equally direct that the constraint is not money. Success, he argued, starts with the right idea, the right positioning and the right policy decisions — drawing a comparison to Facebook and Google, platforms nobody was sent door-to-door to promote, yet which positioned themselves so effectively that the world adopted them anyway. Kenya's tourism sector, he said, must learn to position itself the same way. On capacity, he noted that Kenya's classified accommodation stock stands at roughly 36,000 beds — which, run at full capacity across a year, could theoretically absorb some 13 million visitors, and at a more realistic 50–60% occupancy, between 6.5 and 7 million. The conclusion he drew was that Kenya still has considerable room to grow before new infrastructure becomes the binding constraint; the more immediate need is urgency, positioning and coordination.

He committed personally to championing the policy reforms needed to make tourism work, insisting that the transformation he was calling for is not a matter of magic, but of discipline and direction. In closing, he urged delegates to treat the Symposium as more than an opportunity to socialise — to instead use it as a genuine reflection point for the business and the sector, asking themselves hard questions even where the answers are uncomfortable. Where he could answer those questions himself, he said, he would; where he could not, he would carry them back to government for a response. He acknowledged, with some self-deprecation, that he had arrived bearing difficult numbers rather than pure celebration — but suggested that confronting uncomfortable data now is precisely what will make the sector's turnaround possible.

With those remarks, Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok formally declared the 22nd Annual Symposium of the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers officially open.

> "Data doesn't lie. Numbers don't lie. We have to ask ourselves the hard questions. But with technology and commitment from all of us, we can turn this sector around."
> *— Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok, PS, State Department of Tourism*

Plenary Discussion Following the Keynote Address

The Q&A session, facilitated via Menti.com, drew 37 questions from delegates. Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok addressed five principal issues, ranging from air access and infrastructure to public health messaging and internal government gender balance.

Issue 1 — Air Access and Open Skies

Raised by multiple delegates, citing East Africa Community (EAC) data showing Tanzania outperforming Kenya by KES 66.4 billion in tourism revenue from the same source markets — a gap attributed to Tanzania allowing more international airlines to fly in.

Response:

Amb. Prof. Bitok acknowledged air access as a legitimate and recurring concern, noting that visa liberalisation during his previous tenure as Permanent Secretary (PS) for Immigration had already yielded a 300,000 increase in arrivals — significant, but far short of the step-change needed. He challenged the room directly: if the skies were opened today, would hotels actually fill up? He said he was not certain, and asked industry to confirm this with confidence before presenting open skies as the single solution. He committed to consulting further and reverting, stopping short of a firm commitment on open skies itself.

Issue 2 — Opening of Ronald Ngala Utalii College

Raised by delegates asking about the long-delayed operationalisation of the institution.

Response:

Amb. Prof. Bitok made a firm commitment: having met with his team, the target is to open the College's first intake by September 2026 — a commitment he described as personal.

Issue 3 — Malindi International Airport Upgrade

Raised by delegates noting the runway is too short and the upgrade has been long delayed.

Response:

Amb. Prof. Bitok acknowledged the concern but framed it as secondary to the broader air access question, arguing that upgrading Malindi Airport without first resolving air access more generally would not move the needle. He committed to consulting on the airport issue, but urged industry to focus first on the foundational air access problem, with the airport upgrade to follow as the next step.

Issue 4 — Ebola Quarantine Facility and Tourism Confidence

Raised by a delegate asking what government is doing about the Ebola quarantine facility in Laikipia and its impact on tourism confidence.

Response:

Amb. Prof. Bitok was emphatic and unequivocal: there is no Ebola in Kenya. He called on industry to stop amplifying rumours and instead carry a simple, clear message — that Kenya is safe, surveillance is in place at airports and land borders, and tourists should come without fear. He urged delegates not to reference the quarantine facility in the context of Ebola, since doing so creates a false association.

Issue 5 — Gender Balance in the State Department

Raised after it was observed that only one woman sits among senior leadership in the State Department of Tourism.

Response:

Amb. Prof. Bitok acknowledged the imbalance, described it as a work in progress, and committed to championing gender balance within the Department — noting that in the hospitality sector globally, women already outnumber men at the operational level, and what is needed now is to bring more women into management and leadership.

Issue 6 — Diani Road

Raised by the KAHC Chairman on behalf of delegates: the poor state of Diani Road, a longstanding coastal infrastructure concern first raised at a KAHC symposium in Diani two years earlier and still unresolved.

Response:

The matter was not put to Amb. Prof. Bitok for an immediate response; instead, the Chairman committed KAHC to writing to him formally on the issue as a follow-up action.

Closing the session, the KAHC Chairman clarified that of the issues discussed, three were being carried forward as formal workshop commitments from the PS: air access, the September opening of Ronald Ngala Utalii College, and the Malindi Airport upgrade. Diani Road was logged as a separate KAHC follow-up action. The remaining questions collected via Menti would be compiled and routed to the Amb. Prof. Bitok or other relevant agencies for response outside the session.

> "If the skies were opened today, would hotels fill up? I'm not sure. Industry needs to confirm this with confidence before we present it as the single solution."
> *— Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok, PS, State Department of Tourism*

Summary: Government Commitments and Amb. Prof. Bitok's Recommendations to Industry

Taken together, Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok's Keynote Address and the plenary discussion that followed produced the following set of commitments and recommendations.

Government Commitments

- Policy reform: personally championing all policy changes necessary to make Kenya's tourism sector work, positioning himself as the industry's direct advocate within government.
- MICE positioning: directing his team to actively position Kenya as a year-round MICE destination, bidding for international conferences across all major tourism hubs, not Nairobi alone, and leveraging the forthcoming BOMAS International Cultural Centre.
- Air access: consulting further on the open skies question and reverting to industry with a clear government position.
- Ronald Ngala Utalii College: working to open the College for its first student intake by September 2026 — described as a personal commitment.
- Malindi Airport: consulting on the runway upgrade, with progress contingent on first resolving the foundational air access question.
- Ebola messaging: confirming government surveillance is in place at all airports and land borders, and committing to actively carry the message that Kenya is Ebola-free.
- Gender balance: committing to champion a 50-50 gender balance in the State Department of Tourism's senior leadership.

Amb. Prof. Bitok's Recommendations to Industry

- Diversify tourism products — move decisively beyond beach and safari into sports, cultural, MICE, shopping, health/medical and agri-tourism.
- Build hosting capacity — invest in facilities capable of hosting large international events outside Nairobi and Mombasa; as he put it, if Kenya bid for a 1,000-delegate conference today, industry could not host it.
- Embrace technology and AI — adopt digital tools for operations, marketing and decision-making to compete globally.
- Work together — government cannot do this alone, and neither can industry; coordination between the two is the single most critical enabler of growth.
- Confirm the case for open skies — before presenting air access as the single solution, industry should be prepared to demonstrate with confidence that liberalised access will translate into fuller hotels.

Session **1**

Artificial Intelligence in Hospitality: Driving Sustainable Tourism and Enhancing Guest Experience

By Dr. Joseph Sevilla
Director of @iLabAfrica Research Centre, Strathmore University

Overview: Dr Joseph Sevilla opened by tracing how AI has evolved — from a specialised field known variously as analytics or data science, to a technology now accessible to everyone. He illustrated this with two personal examples: his secretary had recently used AI to draft a board recommendation letter without being prompted, producing a polished result; and he himself had used AI platforms multiple times in the preceding days to find information, getting direct answers without having to navigate through twenty different websites. AI, he said, is affecting everybody — and hospitality and tourism are no exception.

He cited data to frame the scale of adoption globally: 97.8% of travel executives say AI will affect their industry; 80% of hotels are planning AI adoption; 63% of hotel chains are already using AI for revenue management; 70% are deploying chatbots; 58% of guests say AI improves the booking and stay experience; and 51% of travellers now plan their entire trips through AI.

AI technologies in use in the hospitality sector: Dr Sevilla walked participants through the following key AI technologies:

- *Machine learning* — brings together technologies that help with booking, pricing, retrieving client data, predicting demand, personalising offers, and detecting anomalies.
- *Natural language processing* — enables chatbots and voice tools that allow clients to ask questions in natural language and receive relevant answers without human intervention — on a 24/7 basis and across multiple languages, including Italian, German, Chinese, and Japanese, reflecting the many nationalities visiting Kenya.
- *Predictive analytics* — enables operators to follow market trends and visitor patterns and make proactive rather than reactive decisions.
- *Computer vision* — allows for security monitoring, wildlife monitoring — including predicting where animals are — and automated check-in with minimal human

intervention. Dr Sevilla observed that manual check-in processes in many properties keep guests waiting seven to ten minutes unnecessarily.

- *Generative AI* — enables personalised itineraries, content, and concierge responses tailored to each guest.
- *Agentic AI* — the newest development, where AI agents act on a traveller's instruction — checking flights, finding and booking hotels, and preparing full itineraries, with the traveller only confirming and paying at the end.

How Kenya's hospitality industry can tap in: Dr Sevilla asked directly: "How can we take advantage of it?" He identified the following areas where the industry can act:

- *Establish a digital presence* — Hotels must have systems that AI booking agents can query — with information on facilities, amenities, and availability — so that when AI is planning a trip, the property can be found and included in recommendations.
- *WhatsApp booking bots* — WhatsApp is a platform widely used locally. Hotels can implement bots to handle bookings on a 24-hour basis without back-office personnel.
- *Dynamic pricing* — AI can monitor competitor pricing and adjust a hotel's own rates dynamically according to demand — for example, when a major event is coming to Mombasa and accommodation demand is expected to rise.
- *Multilingual digital concierge* — Through AI, hotels can give guests an experience in their own language, across the many nationalities arriving in Kenya.
- *Guest experience and revenue management* — Dr Sevilla listed guest experience, chatbots, personalisation, and revenue management as areas where AI initiatives can be implemented, alongside predictive analytics for following market and visitor trends.

The data challenge: Dr Sevilla identified the lack of locally relevant data as the biggest underlying challenge. The AI models available globally are trained largely on data from Europe and the United States — not relevant to the Kenyan context.

He pointed out that Kenya already holds significant visitor data — through the e-Travel permit completed by every visitor entering the country, and through the KWS e-ticketing system used at every national park. "Do you know how many visitors Kenya had today? Because that information can be extracted from the system." A simple government dashboard could provide that intelligence in real time. However, this data sits fragmented across government agencies and private operators, and is not being pooled or used to train AI models.

He called on the industry to come together to build a shared data repository for Kenya's hospitality sector — work that Strathmore University's iLabAfrica centre and its school of hospitality have already begun, with the aim of building AI models trained on local data that produce locally relevant insights. He noted that creating a Kenyan data repository does not require the massive investment needed by global platforms — local AI models can be run on existing networks at relatively modest cost.

Challenges to Adoption

- *Lack of local data* — The most critical barrier. AI systems trained on foreign data are not relevant to the Kenyan context. Young entrepreneurs with ideas cannot build models without data to train them.
- *Project failure from unclear objectives* — Everybody wants to do AI, but many embark on it without knowing what they want to achieve. Dr Sevilla illustrated this with a workplace example: a managing director tells the IT team to implement AI; the team returns with a list of tools and costs; but nobody has asked what problem needs solving. Buying a tool without knowing what you want to achieve leads to high failure rates and wasted investment.
- *Legacy system fragmentation* — Some systems in use are not open to modern AI agents that need to interact with and manipulate data across platforms.
- *Skills and literacy gap* — At a personal level, staff need general AI literacy — tools such as Word, Excel, and email now carry AI agents that can summarise, answer, and prepare documents. At a corporate level, technical staff must work alongside business teams to identify and solve real business problems using AI.

AI and Human Hospitality

Dr Sevilla addressed the concern that AI will take away jobs, drawing a direct parallel with the arrival of computers. When computers came, people feared the same — and yes, some jobs were lost, but many new ones were created, and people were retrained to work with the new technology. AI will follow the same pattern. There are things AI will not do — the human touch, he said, is precisely what AI cannot replace, and it is what defines hospitality.

Policy

Dr Sevilla informed the meeting that a government AI Strategy had been released earlier in 2026. Separately, he is personally involved in developing an AI Policy for the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Technology. A draft of that policy is currently published and open for public participation, and he urged delegates to submit comments while the window remains open.

On the risks of using AI in policy work, he cited South Africa's experience: a national AI policy was published and recalled two days later after it was found to reference non-existent documents — produced by the very AI technology the policy was meant to govern. He noted the same problem is occurring in courts in the United States and the United Kingdom, where lawyers are being fined for citing AI-generated but non-existent case references. Policy ethics and intellectual property, he said, are critical considerations.

What Strathmore University@iLab Africa is doing:

Dr Sevilla closed by outlining his institution's work: collaborating on AI policy and ethics; implementing AI projects with industry; conducting AI training; working on Internet of Things (IoT) solutions for intelligent room environments — where sensors control temperature, air conditioning, and lighting automatically; training hospitality students to be AI-ready through the university's school of hospitality; and building a local Kenya hospitality data repository to enable AI models trained on locally relevant data.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a digital presence — ensure hotel facilities, amenities, and availability are on systems that AI booking agents can query. Without this, a property will be invisible to the growing number of travellers planning trips through AI.
2. Deploy WhatsApp booking bots to handle reservations and guest enquiries on a 24-hour basis without back-office staffing.
3. Implement dynamic pricing — use AI to monitor competitor rates and adjust pricing in real time according to demand and market conditions.
4. Start with the business problem, not the technology — define clearly what you want to achieve before investing in any AI tool.
5. Invest in staff AI literacy at every level — from personal tools such as Word and email, through to technical staff who must work alongside business teams to solve real operational problems.
6. Come together as an industry to build a shared repository of Kenya hospitality data, enabling AI models trained on locally relevant information.
7. Engage with the AI Policy for the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Technology — the draft is currently open for public participation.

> AI is not going to give you that glass of juice at the reception. Those small touches of hospitality - that human intervention – are what we need. Use AI to amplify human hospitality, not replace it"
>
> *— Dr Joseph Sevilla, Director, @iLabAfrica Research Centre, Strathmore University*

Session **2**

Impact of the Finance Bill on Sustainable Tourism Growth

By Robert Waruiru
Partner and Head of Tax, Ichiban tax & Business Advisory LLP

Overview

Robert Waruiru opened by positioning himself clearly: he does not collect tax — he helps businesses pay the right amount of tax, no more, no less. He set an important caveat at the outset: the Finance Act 2026 had been signed by the President only the previous day. What delegates were seeing was the version the President signed, and the industry would need to wait for the final text as printed by the government printer before a fully conclusive view could be taken. With that context established, he walked delegates through the key changes and their implications for the hospitality sector.

Understanding the Operating Environment — Budget 2026/2027

Before addressing the Finance Act changes, Waruiru contextualised the environment in which businesses are operating and why Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) pursues businesses as aggressively as it does. The national budget for 2026/2027 stands at KES 4.8 trillion. Projected revenue collections for the same period are KES 3.6 trillion — leaving a fiscal deficit of KES 1.1 trillion, or 5.3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He explained the deficit simply: unlike individuals who budget based on what they earn, government starts with what it wants to spend and then works backwards to what it can raise.

Of the KES 4.8 trillion in expenditure, KES 3.5 trillion is recurrent spending — salaries, repairs and maintenance, and debt repayment. In effect, almost the entirety of revenue collected goes towards keeping government running, not development. Against that backdrop, KRA carries a revenue target of approximately KES 2.8 trillion for the current financial year. With collections at KES 2.4 trillion at the time of the Symposium, KRA needed to collect KES 400 billion in June alone. "That gives you an idea of the kind of pressure you will see with KRA as they try to conclude their audits," he told delegates.

Income Tax Act — Key Changes

- Interchange fees on card transactions — A change with direct implications for the sector. When a guest pays by card — Visa, Mastercard, Amex, or similar — the hotel receives slightly less than the face value of the bill. On a KES 1,000 charge, approximately KES 970 reaches the hotel's account; the remaining KES 30 is an interchange fee distributed among four players: the issuing bank, the receiving bank, the POS machine owner, and the card network. Under the Finance Act 2026, that interchange fee will now be subject to 20% withholding tax and 16% VAT — a combined 36% increase in the cost of card transactions. Who absorbs that cost — the hotel, the bank, or the guest — remains to be seen. This change arose from a 15-year dispute between KRA and a payment services provider, where the Supreme Court ruled the services were not subject to withholding tax. Government has now changed the law to make it unambiguously clear that they are. Waruiru urged delegates to review their agreements with POS providers carefully.
- Gratuity — now two qualifying criteria — The Finance Bill 2026 originally proposed three conditions for gratuity payments to be tax exempt: a contract of at least three years; a gratuity not exceeding 31% of total pay; and no prior contribution to a pension scheme. During public participation, the third condition was successfully challenged — since all employees contribute to NSSF, a public pension scheme, the third condition would have disqualified everyone. The Finance Act has dropped it. Gratuity is now tax exempt where two conditions are met: the employment contract runs for at least three years, and the gratuity does not exceed 31% of total pay.
- Tax loss carry-forward — transition clause for investments of KES 10 billion and above only — Operators who claim capital allowances on significant property investments may find themselves in a tax loss position for tax purposes, even while recording accounting profits. A 2025 change in law set a five-year limit on carrying forward tax losses, without a transition provision — meaning KRA has been disallowing losses older than five years with immediate effect, including losses arising from investments made before the rule changed. The Finance Act 2026 introduces a transition clause, but only for capital investments of at least KES 10 billion. Waruiru questioned the policy rationale, noting that very few investments in the sector would meet that threshold, and described it as effectively withdrawing incentives previously given to investors. He noted that his firm is actively looking for a test case to challenge KRA's current interpretation, and invited any delegate with such a situation to come forward.
- Dual assessment — Kenya adopted self-assessment in 1992, meaning taxpayers assess their own tax liability. KRA is now introducing a parallel regime where it can also issue its own assessment — hence "dual assessment." Where KRA issues an assessment, it is required to provide the basis and all supporting documentation. For individuals, the new tax return filing due date is 30 April. For companies, the deadline remains the end of the sixth month following their year end — so December year-end companies continue to file by 30 June.
- Commissions for international transport services — withholding tax exemption expanded — Previously, commissions paid by travel agents for international travel

were exempt from withholding tax. The Finance Act has broadened this exemption by replacing the word "travel" with "transport services" — meaning commissions for any international transport service are now exempt. Waruiru described this as a positive development for the sector.

Value Added Tax (VAT) — Key Changes

- Definition of tour operator and in-house supplies — The VAT Act has long provided an exemption for tour services under the First Schedule, but the definition of who qualifies as a tour operator has been unclear. The Finance Act 2026 now defines a tour operator as one who is licensed or regulated by the relevant regulator — though Waruiru noted some ambiguity remains about which specific regulator applies, given that licensing in the tourism sector involves more than one authority. In-house supplies — defined as goods or services brought in from outside without substantial transformation, or provided directly from a property's own resources such as in-house transport using own vehicles — are excluded from the tour operator exemption and therefore subject to VAT. Waruiru noted he has been involved in at least two cases where KRA has pursued hospitality businesses for VAT on in-house supplies, and urged delegates to review their operations in this regard.
- VAT exemption on tourism facilities removed — The existing VAT exemption for investments in recreational parks of 50 acres or more has been removed under the Finance Act 2026. Such investments will now be subject to VAT.
- Bad debt VAT refund application timeline extended from two to three years — Under current law, if a business has charged VAT on a supply but has not been paid within two years, it can apply for a refund of the VAT paid on that bad debt. The Finance Act extends this waiting period to three years before a refund application can be made — an additional cash flow burden for businesses already carrying outstanding receivables.
- VAT invoices — VAT-registered persons only — The Finance Act clarifies that only VAT-registered persons may issue invoices showing VAT. If a business is not VAT-registered, it has no basis for issuing a VAT invoice. Waruiru noted this had been a source of significant confusion following an earlier Finance Committee position that appeared to require all businesses to issue VAT invoices.

Tax Procedures Act — Key Changes

- Tax amnesty to 31 December 2026 — Any outstanding tax liabilities not yet paid can benefit from a full waiver of penalties and interest — provided the principal tax is paid by 31 December 2026. Waruiru described this as an important opportunity and urged delegates to review their records, establish any outstanding liabilities, and get into a payment plan or settle the principal tax before the window closes.
- Failure to withhold tax — principal tax now payable even where the other party has accounted for it — Previously, if a business failed to deduct withholding tax from a payment but the recipient had accounted for the tax themselves, the business was only liable for the penalty. From 1 July 2026, the law changes: even if the recipient has accounted for the tax, the business that failed to withhold remains liable for the

principal tax — meaning KRA can effectively collect the same tax twice. Waruiru flagged this as a critical compliance point requiring immediate attention.

- Import documentation requirement — Any business importing goods into Kenya must now maintain the export declaration documentation issued by the country of origin. This is a new requirement applicable to all imports.
- Commissioner's power to disregard tax avoidance schemes — The Commissioner of KRA now has explicit statutory powers to disregard arrangements entered into solely for the purpose of avoiding tax, and to assess the tax that would otherwise have been payable. This includes excise duty arrangements, which previously lacked a specific provision. Waruiru noted that businesses should expect KRA to scrutinise their transactions more closely as a result.
- Agency notices during appeals — proposal dropped — A proposal to allow KRA to issue agency notices — effectively freezing a taxpayer's funds — even while that taxpayer was appealing an assessment at the Tax Appeals Tribunal was strongly opposed and has been dropped. A further proposal to require taxpayers to pay 50% of the disputed principal tax while an appeal was pending was also dropped, following representations that this would effectively deny taxpayers access to justice, given KRA's poor track record on refunds.
- Appeals timeline — proposal to count all days dropped — A proposal to change the method of counting appeal days from working days only to all days — including weekends and public holidays — was also dropped. The current counting method is retained.
- eTIMS non-compliance penalties revised — The penalty for non-compliance with eTIMS — Kenya's electronic tax invoicing system — has been restructured to the higher of twice the tax due, KES 100,000 for a company, or KES 10,000 for an individual. A waiver of penalties and interest of up to KES 2 million is available for genuine eTIMS errors. Waruiru illustrated the importance of eTIMS compliance with a real case: a guest consumed a KES 340 soda at a hotel and left without paying. The hotel was unable to issue an invoice in time and faced a penalty of up to KES 1 million — wholly disproportionate. The revised penalties are more reasonable, but the obligation to issue an invoice for every transaction, however small, remains absolute. His practical advice: if a guest leaves without paying, run after them and issue the invoice.

Closing Note

Waruiru closed by reminding delegates that the final authoritative text of the Finance Act would only be available once the government printer released the official document. Until that document is in hand, some details remain subject to confirmation. He committed, together with KAHC, to providing a more detailed industry-specific briefing once the final Finance Act is available.

KEY ACTIONS FOR THE INDUSTRY

1. Review card payment agreements with POS and bank providers to understand who bears the additional cost arising from the new withholding tax and VAT on interchange fees — a combined 36% increase.
2. Review all gratuity arrangements to confirm compliance with the two qualifying conditions now in force: contracts of at least three years, and gratuity not exceeding 31% of total pay.
3. Review tax loss positions, particularly where losses pre-date the 2025 five-year limit change and fall below the KES 10 billion transition threshold. Seek legal advice where KRA has disallowed losses without a valid transition clause.
4. Take advantage of the tax amnesty — review records for outstanding liabilities and pay the principal tax by 31 December 2026 to secure a full waiver of all penalties and interest.
5. Review all payment arrangements where withholding tax is required. From 1 July 2026, failure to withhold exposes the business to the principal tax even where the recipient has already accounted for it.
6. Maintain export declaration documentation from the country of origin for all goods imported into Kenya — this is now a statutory requirement.
7. Review in-house supply arrangements — particularly transport and other services provided from own resources — for VAT exposure following the new definition of in-house supplies.
8. Ensure full eTIMS compliance across all outlets. Issue an invoice for every transaction without exception, and retain all documentation accordingly.

Session 3

Building Sustainable Business Partnerships-Brookside Dairy

By Brookside Dairy Limited, Platinum Partner

Overview

This session was anchored around a short corporate documentary titled the Brookside Story.

The Documentary — Brookside's Story

The documentary traced Brookside's journey from its founding in 1993 to its present position as East Africa's leading dairy company. It opened with the company's first day of sales — when the founding team drove from supermarket to supermarket with approximately 10,000 litres of milk and found no takers, until a single shopkeeper took one crate out of sympathy. That one crate, in that one supermarket, was described as the genesis of Brookside.

The film walked delegates through the company's growth over more than three decades: from a small dairy operation to a market leader with over 160,000 farmer partners across East Africa; from a single product to a full range covering milk, butter, yogurt, flavoured milk, lactose-free and plant-based options; and from the Kenyan market to exports reaching Uganda, Tanzania, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Singapore, and beyond. The company holds FSSC 22000 food safety certification and is the only dairy in Kenya with products endorsed by the Kenya Nutrition and Dietetics Institute.

The documentary also brought out Brookside's commitment to the communities it operates in — through farmer training and support, a national mathematics competition running for fifteen years with scholarships for top performers, and significant social investments including a KES 30 million contribution to secondary school games. The film closed with a statement of intent: Brookside, after more than 33 years as a dairy brand, is evolving into East and Central Africa's leading food and beverage company — still driven by purpose, still powered by innovation, and guided by a simple mission to enrich the lives of the people of Africa.

Partnership Offer to the Industry

Following the documentary, Brookside's General Manager for Sales, Joseph Muguongo addressed delegates directly on what the partnership means in practical terms. Brookside, he said, is moving away from transactional trading towards long-term partnerships with the hospitality industry. The offer on the table includes:

- **Supply reliability** — Guaranteed year-round supply — 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- **Contract pricing** — Contract pricing to support planning and budgeting with greater predictability.
- **Nationwide distribution** — Distribution reach across 47 counties in Kenya, ensuring product availability wherever a property is located.

Cheque Presentation

In a gesture of continued commitment to the hospitality industry and to KAHC, Joseph Muguongo concluded the session with a formal cheque presentation to the Symposium.

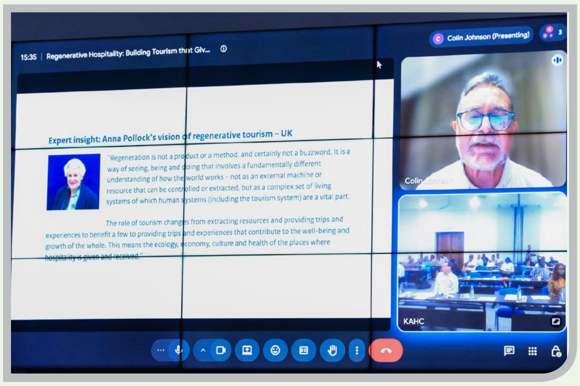
CHEQUE PRESENTATION BY BROOKSIDE DAIRY LIMITED
KES 1,000,000
22nd KAHC Annual Symposium — Malindi, June 2026

The cheque, totalling Kenya Shillings One Million, was formally presented by Brookside Dairy Limited to KAHC Chairman Mr Christopher Musau, Chief Executive Officer Mr Mike Macharia, and members of the KAHC Board, who were all present to receive it. This was Brooksides tangible and ongoing commitment to its partnership with Kenya's hospitality industry.

Session **4**

Regenerative Hospitality: Building Tourism That Gives Back More Than It Takes

By Colin Johnson, PhD, Professor
Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management
San Francisco State University



Overview

Professor Colin Johnson joined the Symposium via a live video link from Macau, China, presenting on a concept he believes is both timely and well-suited to Kenya's hospitality sector — regenerative tourism. He prefaced his remarks by acknowledging the Symposium's theme of sustainable tourism growth and global excellence, and framed regenerative tourism not as a replacement for sustainability, but as the next level of thinking built upon it. Many businesses in Kenya, he noted, may already be practising elements of it without necessarily naming it as such.

What Is Regenerative Tourism?

Prof. Johnson drew a clear distinction between conventional sustainability and regenerative tourism. Conventional sustainability, as defined by the United Nations Environment Programme and UN Tourism, is well understood. Regenerative tourism goes further — it is a fundamentally different way of thinking about the relationship between tourism, nature, communities, and the economy.

The core idea is rooted in what he described as living systems thinking: the recognition that nature, culture, economy, land, and people are not separate entities but an interconnected whole, in which every part affects every other part. It seeks net positive outcomes — leaving places better than they were found — and places the community at the centre of the tourism experience, not at its periphery.

He illustrated the spectrum of thinking using a framework that moves from conventional practice — where compliance with the law is the benchmark — through sustainability and neutrality, to the regenerative end, where humans participate as part of nature and contribute to the co-evolution of the whole system.

Key Pillars of Regenerative Tourism

Prof. Johnson identified four pillars that define regenerative tourism in practice:

- **Ecological worldview** — nature is not a resource to be extracted but an interconnected system of which tourism is a part. Everything in the destination — environment, culture, economy, and community — is treated as part of one living system.
- **Community empowerment** — local communities are not passive beneficiaries but active co-creators and decision-makers in the tourism experience. He cited the inequality in the global safari industry — where many local communities receive only a small percentage of the income generated — as the kind of imbalance regenerative tourism directly addresses.
- **Net positive impact** — the goal is not to do less harm, but to actively restore and improve. This applies to biodiversity, cultural heritage, economic inclusion, and community wellbeing.
- **Co-creation over consumption** — tourists are not passive observers but active participants in the regenerative process — giving back through their time, their actions, and their engagement with local people and places. Quality of experience is prioritised over volume of visitors.

How the Industry Can Apply It

Prof. Johnson was explicit that regenerative tourism is a journey, not a destination. It does not require every business to be fully regenerative from day one, and many Kenyan operators are already doing elements of it. What matters, he said, is that businesses move forward with care, equity, and purpose. He offered a practical checklist of actions the industry can begin or scale up:

- Observe and listen to what is happening in the local community — understand the needs, the culture, and the ecosystem before designing experiences.
- Initiate community conversations and build genuine partnerships with local people and local enterprises.
- Create small, immersive experiences that involve local communities — villagers, artisans, cultural practitioners — alongside visitors.
- Support communities through direct visitor contributions — a portion of guest spend channelled into community-led initiatives.
- Pursue certification — he noted the East Africa certification scheme already in place, and referenced internationally recognised standards including EarthCheck, Green Destinations, and Green Key, which are available globally.
- Design slow, immersive experiences — sometimes deliberately stepping back from full digital and Wi-Fi connectivity to offer guests a more reflective, meaningful stay.
- Invest in local training and capacity building — ensuring that skills developed through tourism remain in the community.
- Measure outcomes — not just financial performance but environmental restoration, cultural vitality, community wellbeing, and local employment retention.

On measurement, he offered specific indicators the industry can adopt: habitat and species restoration as ecological measures; percentage of staff trained and above living wage as social measures; local procurement ratios and number of local enterprises supplied as economic measures; and percentage of graduates retaining local employment after 12 to 24 months as a community development measure.

Case Studies — Lessons for Kenya

Prof. Johnson presented four case studies to illustrate regenerative tourism in practice:

- **Vietnam — Tented Camp, Central Highlands** — a jungle-tented camp focused on reforestation, organic farming, and preservation of local heritage through traditional architecture, local employment, and community-led cultural experiences. Local communities took the lead in shaping activities and decisions, ensuring tourism directly supported their livelihoods, culture, and knowledge systems.
- **Bali, Indonesia — Jungle-Tented Camp, Ubud** — a camp that supported local schoolchildren through plastic waste collection — awarding school credits for collected plastics — while also providing English lessons and preserving traditional Teleki painting skills. Each guest received an individual Teleki painting created by a student, giving them a tangible story to take home. On average, 190 kilograms of plastic waste were collected and 186 students from grades one to six participated in English courses annually.
- **Portugal — Rural Community Regeneration** — a rural community devastated by wildfire used regenerative tourism — inspired by Mexican community rebuilding traditions — to revive the area through a reforestation programme and tablecloth-making workshops. Families who had considered leaving became so proud of their cultural identity that they remained and rebuilt, with tourism as the catalyst.
- **Kenya — Waste to Wealth (Circular Economy)** — Prof. Johnson highlighted a Kenyan example involving a dynamic circular economy model in which ocean and community waste were collected and transformed into art, jewellery, and construction materials by local women, youth, and artisans. The model included a buyback scheme, a dedicated material recovery centre, upcycling and eco-construction, and a phased elimination of single-use plastics. He noted this as clear evidence that Kenya already has regenerative tourism models in practice.

Challenges

Prof. Johnson was candid about the challenges of adopting the regenerative model:

- Difficult to define precisely — regenerative tourism resists a single universal definition because each journey depends on the specific place, people, nature, and issues involved.
- Risk of becoming a buzzword — just as "green" and "sustainable" have been misused, regenerative tourism could be co-opted as a marketing label without substance.
- Difficult to measure — the outcomes are complex and long-term, requiring systemic tracking across environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions.
- Requires systemic change and long-term commitment — it is not a quick fix

and demands genuine stakeholder coordination across government, industry, communities, and visitors.

- Short-term profitability may be reduced — particularly for small businesses in the early stages of the transition.
- Slower growth compared to conventional tourism models, and risk that local communities remain marginalised if the model is not implemented with genuine equity at its centre.

The Challenge to Kenya's Hospitality Industry

Prof. Johnson closed with a direct challenge to delegates, drawing on the words of regenerative tourism practitioner Anna Pollock: regenerative tourism is not a product, a method, or a buzzword. It is a way of seeing, being, and doing that involves a fundamentally different understanding of how the world works — not as an external machine or resource to be extracted, but as a complex set of living systems of which human systems, including tourism, are a vital part.

Small and medium-sized hospitality businesses, he argued, have a unique advantage in this model precisely because of their close ties to land, local customs, and community life. With clear purpose, these businesses can quietly lead a powerful change — offering experiences that heal, teach, and inspire, while protecting the places they call home.

> "It's not about doing more. It's about doing differently. It asks us to act with more care, host with more meaning, and imagine a future where tourism is truly good for life."
> *— Prof. Colin Johnson, PhD, Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management, San Francisco State University*

THE CHALLENGE TO THE INDUSTRY

1. Audit your current operations against the regenerative checklist — how many of these measures are already being implemented?
2. Identify which measures could be initiated, increased, or scaled up by the time of the next Symposium.
3. Begin with one community partnership, one immersive experience, or one local procurement commitment — and build from there.
4. Pursue certification under an internationally recognised framework — EarthCheck, Green Destinations, Green Key, or the East Africa certification scheme.
5. Start measuring outcomes beyond revenue: environmental restoration, community wellbeing, cultural vitality, and local employment retention.
6. Commit to the journey — regenerative tourism is not achieved overnight, but every step forward with care, equity, and purpose moves Kenya's hospitality sector closer to global excellence.

Best Paper Award Recognition

In closing the session, Mr Mike Macharia took a moment to congratulate Prof. Johnson on behalf of KAHC, informing delegates that Prof. Johnson, together with KAHC's own Sam Ikwaye and co-researchers Michael Evans of the University of Salford and Vilkelwa Nomnga, had been awarded the Best Paper Award at the 13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management (AHTMM) Conference held at Macau University of Science and Technology from 22 to 26 June 2026, for their paper titled "The Influence of National Culture on Leadership and Employee Relations in Small Tourism Accommodation Enterprises: Evidence from South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya." The award certificate was displayed to the plenary, to a warm round of applause.

13th ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT (AHTMM) CONFERENCE
June 22 – June 26, 2026 – Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

BEST PAPER AWARD

This Certificate is proudly presented to

Michael Evans (University of Salford), Colin Johnson (San Francisco State University), Sam Ikwaye (Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers KAHC), and Vilkelwa Nomnga

In recognition of their outstanding research contribution and excellence in scholarly work.

The paper entitled

" The Influence of National Culture on Leadership and Employee Relations in Small Tourism Accommodation Enterprises: Evidence from South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya "

has been selected as the Best Paper Award winner at the 13th AHTMM Conference, in acknowledgment of its significant contribution, originality, academic rigor, and impact on the advancement of knowledge in the field.

We extend our sincere congratulations and appreciation for this remarkable achievement.

Regents Professor Dogan Gursoy	Dean Aliana Leong Man Wai	Dean Ben Goh Kok Beng	Mahlagha Darvishmotevali
Washington State University	Macau University of Science and Technology	Macau University of Science and Technology	SHTM, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Conference Chair	*Conference Co-Chair*	*Conference Co-Chair*	*Conference Paper Review Chair*

Session **5**

Connecting Your Business to Profits

By Larry Otieno
DSTV Business - Platinum Sponsor

Overview

The DStv Business team delivered a lively and visually engaging session, anchored around two short video clips that brought their proposition to life more effectively than any set of statistics could. The first clip showed a bar and restaurant with no content on screen — empty seats, idle staff, and a venue generating nothing. The moment a live sporting event was switched on, guests arrived, the atmosphere shifted, and the venue filled. The second clip mirrored this from a hotel perspective — a quiet, inactive property transformed into a busy, revenue-generating environment the instant premium content was made available. The message was deliberate and direct: premium content creates footfall, footfall creates spend, and spend creates profit. The rest of the session built the business case around that single, powerful idea.

The Shift: From Cost Line to Revenue Asset

Larry from DStv Business opened with a challenge to the industry: stop treating entertainment content as an operating expense and start treating it as a revenue-generating asset. The hospitality sector has changed. Today's guest does not choose a hotel, restaurant, or club based on the product alone — they choose the experience. Connectivity, personalisation, value, and quality in-room and in-venue entertainment are now among the primary factors influencing where guests stay, where they eat and drink, and whether they come back.

The traditional hospitality revenue model — room revenue, food and beverage, events, and meetings — remains the foundation. But there is a growing layer of emerging revenue drivers that forward-looking operators are already tapping into: guest experience, sports entertainment, viewing events, premium experiences, and loyalty. Premium content, the session argued, is the thread that connects all of them. It directly influences:

- Hotel choice — guests actively consider the quality of in-room and in-venue entertainment when selecting a property.
- Dining decisions — guests engaged by compelling content at the table stay longer and spend more.
- Bar footfall — a venue showing a major sporting event draws significantly more guests than one that is not.
- Social gatherings — premium content turns a hotel bar or lounge into a destination for groups, generating event-driven revenue over and above the usual walk-in trade.
- Loyalty and repeat business — guests who associate a property with a great experience — including great entertainment — are more likely to return and to recommend.

What DStv Business Offers the Industry

Larry presented a structured offering to the hospitality sector built around three pillars — content, technology, and support:

- **Content** — A diverse and extensive content portfolio spanning sports, movies, news, general entertainment, lifestyle, music, documentaries, and children's programming. Packages are tailored to different property types, guest profiles, and budget levels — including language-specific options for international guests, with Asian-facing, French-facing, and European-facing content available to match Kenya's diverse source markets.
- **Technology** — Partnerships with technology providers to ensure quality, variety, and reliability of content delivery — with the right technical infrastructure designed and installed for each property's specific environment.
- **Support** — A hardware subsidy programme to assist properties in acquiring IPTV systems and other technical infrastructure, complemented by free in-house engineering and technical advisory services — so that operators can make informed investment decisions and get genuine value for money from their setup.

Live and Immediate Opportunities for the Industry

The session highlighted the FIFA World Cup 2026 — already under way at the time of the Symposium — as a live, time-sensitive commercial opportunity that every segment of the hospitality industry can act on now. With billions of viewers globally and millions of fans actively seeking venues in which to watch and celebrate, properties offering a premium viewing experience have a clear and immediate competitive advantage over those that do not. The opportunity breaks down by segment as follows:

- **Hotels** — Increased occupancy, group bookings, and extended guest stays as visitors choose properties with premium viewing experiences over those without.
- **Restaurants and Bars** — Increased footfall and higher food and beverage spend from both in-house guests and walk-in customers seeking a venue to watch, eat, drink, and celebrate.
- **Resorts** — Destination viewing experiences that position the resort as a World Cup venue in its own right, driving activity across all revenue lines.

- **Golf Clubs** — Extended member engagement — members who stay on the property to watch matches after their round spend more time and more money on the premises.

Beyond the World Cup, Larry made clear that the opportunity does not end when the tournament does. Guest expectations for quality entertainment continue year-round. Operators were encouraged to think of premium content as a permanent pillar of their revenue strategy — attracting guests into social spaces, keeping them engaged and on property longer, building the kind of loyalty that brings them back, and differentiating the property in an increasingly competitive market.

> "Experience is becoming one of hospitality's most powerful revenue drivers."
> *— DStv Business, MultiChoice Kenya*

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THE INDUSTRY

1. Reframe entertainment content in your budget — treat it as a revenue-generating asset, not an operating cost.
2. Act now on the FIFA World Cup 2026 — create viewing events, group packages, and food and beverage promotions around live matches to capture immediate footfall and spend.
3. Review your current content offering against your guest profile — are you providing the sports, entertainment, and language-specific content your guests actually want?
4. Assess your technical infrastructure — visit the DStv Business stand to explore the hardware subsidy programme and access free technical advisory support before committing to any investment.
5. Build a content calendar beyond the World Cup — use premium content as a year-round strategy to attract, engage, retain, and grow your guest base.
6. Explore tailored packages for international guests — language-specific content is available to match the diverse source markets visiting Kenya's properties.

Session **6**

The Role of Education and Training in Building Sustainable Businesses

By Patrick Kimamo
Business Development Manager, Boma International Hospitality College (BIHC) - Platinum sponsor

Overview

The Boma International Hospitality College (BIHC) session was presented by Patrick Kimamo, Business Development Manager, accompanied by a delegation that included the Head of Research and Innovation, the Marketing and Admissions Lead, an Alumni Advisor and Partnership Officer, and an Industry Partnership Officer. Kimamo opened with a direct challenge to the room: most people still define hospitality as rooms, food, and service. His reframe was immediate — hospitality is about experience, and the workforce that delivers it. Innovation, skill, and people are the three things that determine whether a hospitality business grows, stagnates, or falls behind.

The Skills Crisis — A Threat to Sustainable Growth

Kimamo grounded the session in data from the World Economic Forum (WEF) Jobs Report 2025. By 2030, 59% of the global workforce will have experienced skills atrophy — holding qualifications that are no longer relevant to the demands of the market. Separately, 63% of business owners surveyed identified the skills gap within their own teams as the single biggest constraint on their growth plans.

For Kenya's hospitality sector, the stakes are specific. The industry already supports 1.8 million jobs, with a further 1.5 million projected to be added as the sector expands towards the national target of five million tourist arrivals. Kimamo's challenge to the room was direct: if the existing workforce is already experiencing skills atrophy, the new wave of workers coming into the sector will find colleagues with obsolete skills. Growing infrastructure without simultaneously growing human capital, he said, undermines the very growth being pursued.

WEF JOBS REPORT 2025

The skills crisis threatening Kenya's hospitality growth

59% of global workforce facing skills atrophy by 2030

63% cite skills gap as top growth barrier

KENYA'S HOSPITALITY WORKFORCE

1.8 million	+ 1.5 million
Current workforce at risk of atrophy	New jobs toward 5M arrivals target

New workers will arrive to find colleagues with obsolete skills — unless investment in human capital starts now.

Source: *WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025 | KAHC 22nd Annual Symposium, Malindi 2026*

Human Capital as a Competitive Driver

Kimamo was deliberate in how BIHC approached the Symposium theme. Rather than focusing on environmental sustainability, the session addressed the sustainability of business performance — and the role of people in sustaining it. He posed a direct question to operators: as you plan your FF&E cycles, as you budget for room refurbishments and property upgrades, are you also budgeting to develop the staff who service those rooms and serve those guests?

He made a clear case: once staff are trained, they perform better. Better performance retains guests. Guest retention builds consistent revenue. He was candid that a general manager's instinct may be to protect the bottom line by reducing training spend — but the consequence is a workforce that cannot sustain the revenue the business depends on.

Untapped Opportunities the Industry Must Act On

Kimamo identified several areas where Kenya's hospitality sector is not yet fully capitalising on what it has — all of which require trained, skilled, and innovative people to deliver:

- **Cultural tourism and cuisine** — Kenya's diverse cultures, cuisines, and traditions are attractions in their own right, but the sector has not invested in the skills or products needed to present them meaningfully to visitors. He noted that a visitor wanting Ugandan, Moroccan, or Italian cuisine would find it difficult to get in many Kenyan hotels — yet a bar is available in almost every property. He called on the industry to take pride in Kenyan cuisine and to actively develop and present it.
- **Kenya's food diplomacy** — He cited Thailand as a benchmark — a country whose food diplomacy has resulted in a Thai restaurant being present in virtually every major city in the world. He challenged delegates: in a city such as Lagos, would you find a restaurant showcasing Kenyan food and culture? The answer, he said, reflects how much work remains to be done.
- **Wellness tourism** — Kimamo noted that wellness, including mental health and wellbeing, has become a significant driver of travel decisions. The industry is talking about wellness but has not yet systematically designed products and trained staff to serve this market.

- **Agro-tourism** — Drawing on a conversation BIHC had with the Jordanian Embassy, which identified participatory agro-tourism as a rising trend, Kimamo described a model where visitors participate directly in the daily activities of a working farm — not the passive farm visit brochure already common in Nairobi hotels. He noted that many international visitors have never seen a live goat — commonplace in Kenya — and that such experiences, properly packaged with trained hosts, represent a genuine and marketable product.

What Must Change — A Call for Collaboration

Kimamo identified three things that must change for the sector to build a sustainable training and human capital ecosystem:

- Training institutions must stop competing and start collaborating. For Kenya's destination to be competitive, institutions, industry operators, and government must speak the same language and package the destination consistently.
- The industry must define and enforce a training standard. KAHC has a role to play in ensuring that what constitutes quality hospitality training is clearly defined, so that operators know what they are procuring.
- Operators must budget intentionally for people development. As properties are upgraded and expanded, training investment must sit alongside capital investment in the business plan — not as an afterthought, but as a deliberate budget line.

Kimamo invited operators to engage BIHC directly — both to assess skills gaps within their current teams and to discuss upskilling programmes. The Industry Partnership Officer places over 400 students into industry placements every three months and is actively seeking contacts across the sector.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Include a training and development budget line in your annual business plan — treat people investment with the same discipline as capital investment.
2. Engage BIHC to conduct a skills gap assessment for your property and identify where targeted training will have the greatest impact.
3. Design and package cultural and culinary experiences for your guests — Kenya's diverse cultures and cuisines are an underutilised asset that trained staff can bring to life.
4. Explore wellness and agro-tourism as distinct product offerings — both are growing markets that require intentional product design and skilled delivery.
5. Work with KAHC and training institutions to define and uphold an industry training standard across the sector.
6. Connect with BIHC's Industry Partnership Officer to explore student placement and internship programmes as a pipeline for trained hospitality talent.

> "As you think about refurbishing your rooms, are you also thinking about the people who are going to serve the guests in those rooms? Human capital is as important as the infrastructure you are building."
> *— Patrick Kimamo, Business Development Manager, Boma International Hospitality College (BIHC)*

Session **7**

Strengthening Destination Resilience in an era of global Uncertainty

By Dr Abert Kariuki
Director, Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre – Eastern Africa, Kenyatta University

Overview

Dr Albert Kariuki framed his session around a simple question: as shocks keep coming, can tourism destinations be able to anticipate, withstand, and recover from them?

The Reality of Our Times

Dr Kariuki asked delegates to take a walk back a few years. Before 2018, the reality of the tourism industry was stable. Since then, a series of shocks have fundamentally altered the landscape:

- COVID-19 and its enormous implications for travel and hospitality.
- The Middle East conflict and its implications for international travel.
- The Ebola scare and its implications for travel confidence, particularly in Africa.
- Travel advisories issued by source markets.
- Climate change.

The industry, he said, has never been the same. And the shocks keep coming. There will always be wars. Climate will continue to change. The industry needs to find a way to withstand them.

What is Destination Resilience?

Dr Kariuki positioned resilience as the newest and most important debate in global tourism — the natural next step beyond sustainability, which has dominated the conversation since the 1990s. Resilience, he said, is the newest kid on the block. It is a trend. It is fashionable. And it is about bouncing back.

DEFINITION	**THE NAIROBI DECLARATION 2026**
Resilience is the ability of a tourism destination to anticipate, prepare for, withstand, respond to, recover from and adapt to shocks — while protecting visitors, livelihoods, businesses, culture and ecosystems.	By 2030, global tourism will be: **More Resilient** to the shocks of an uncertain world **More Inclusive** in the distribution of opportunity **More Sustainable** in environmental and social practice **More Collaborative** in its governance *Adopted at KICC, Nairobi — 17 February 2026*

The Global Resilience Movement — And Kenya's Place In It

The resilience debate started in Central American countries and the Pacific — particularly Jamaica, which has faced significant challenges from natural disasters. In response, the Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre (GTRCMC) was established in Jamaica as the first of its kind in the world.

When the idea was brought to Africa, Kenya stepped forward and became home to the second Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre in the world, headquartered in Nairobi. Dr Kariuki noted with pride that many countries in Africa could not take up the idea, but Kenya said yes. The centre represents 14 countries across the Eastern Africa region: Kenya, Burundi, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Madagascar, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The United Nations has declared 17 February as Global Tourism Resilience Day. The UN has further declared 2027 the International Year of Sustainability and Resilient Tourism (#IYSRT2027). Dr Kariuki noted to KAHC CEO Mike Macharia directly that when the theme for next year's Symposium is being set, resilience must be included — it will be the defining international conversation of that year.

In February 2026, Nairobi hosted the 4th Global Tourism Resilience Day, Conference and Expo at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre. Kenya is the only country outside Jamaica to have hosted this event. Delegates from across the world came, and Dr Kariuki said they discovered what Kenya and Nairobi are capable of. The conference produced the Nairobi Declaration on Global Tourism Resilience, adopted on 17 February 2026, committing to a global tourism sector that is more resilient, more inclusive, more sustainable, and more collaborative by 2030.

What Government Is Doing

Dr Kariuki outlined what government is doing under the Kenya National Tourism Strategy 2025–2030:

- Developing a National Tourism Crisis Management and Resilience Strategy.
- Establishing a Tourism Crisis Management Unit (TCMU).

- Developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for crisis response.
- Conducting regular risk assessments of tourism circuits and sites.
- Strengthening early warning and communication systems.

Where KAHC and Its Members Fit In

Dr Kariuki turned to the industry directly, asking what KAHC and its membership can specifically do to create business continuity and faster recovery. He acknowledged that KAHC already does advocacy, representation, information exchange, and collective industry voice — and said these are exactly the tools needed to drive resilience across the accommodation sector. He presented six specific opportunities:

OPPORTUNITY	HOW KAHC CAN ACT
Business continuity and faster recovery	Develop crisis-response guidelines, emergency communication protocols, and recovery toolkits for hotels, lodges, and camps.
Stronger domestic tourism market	Work with KTB to promote resident rates, staycations, conferences, school-holiday packages, and county-based tourism circuits.
Improved public-private coordination	Act as the bridge between accommodation providers and government agencies during planning, crisis response, and recovery.
Competitive and sustainable accommodation standards	Promote certification, classification, sustainability standards, and best-practice sharing among members.
Climate-smart operations	Negotiate green financing, organise climate-resilience training, and lobby for incentives for sustainable hotel investments.
Product diversification	Provide market intelligence, support joint marketing, and encourage members to develop diversified packages.

The Domestic Tourism Imperative

Dr Kariuki advised that the industry needs to go domestic — to feed on its own products, demonstrate they are good, and own the industry. He noted that international arrivals stood at around 2.4 to 2.7 million, and that domestic tourism still presents a significant opportunity. He challenged delegates: we need to create products that are competitive for the domestic tourism sector.

The Closing Challenge

Dr Kariuki closed with a call to action: KAHC has called delegates together, and the one thing they must take home is the new gospel of resilience. He challenged every delegate to go from the Symposium and spread resilience thinking — to make it part of every conversation, every business decision, and every policy discussion. Destinations, he said, have moved from sustainability. The next horizon is resilience.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INDUSTRY

1. Internalise resilience as a core business principle — develop a crisis-response plan for your property.
2. Support KAHC's advocacy for the National Tourism Crisis Management and Resilience Strategy.
3. Invest in domestic tourism — develop resident rates, staycation packages, and county-based products that sustain revenue when international arrivals fall.
4. Engage with the International Year of Sustainability and Resilient Tourism 2027 — position your property to benefit from the global attention it will bring.
5. Diversify your product offering — move beyond traditional products to build a resilient, multi-market business.
6. Participate in KAHC's collective industry voice — the strength of the sector's response to any crisis depends on coordination and a united front.
7. Include resilience as a topic in the 2027 KAHC Symposium.

"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass — it's about learning to dance in the rain. Go from this room and spread the gospel of resilience."
— Dr Albert Kariuki, Director, GTRCMC-EA, Kenyatta University

SESSION **8**

Decision Fatigue and Mental Health: Protecting Executive Clarity and Workforce Wellbeing

By Dr Stephen Wahome
Consultant Clinical Psychologist, M.P. Shah Hospital and Psychological Health Services

Overview

Dr Stephen Wahome closed Day One with a session he described as one that touches the way we do things. Noting that most delegates in the room are in decision-making roles, he framed the topic around a reality that the industry has been moving away from — the stigmatisation of mental health — and towards a more open conversation about how mental demands at work affect the quality of decisions, the health of individuals, and the performance of organisations. The session was structured around five objectives: understanding decision fatigue and its impact on mental health; recognising its signs and symptoms; exploring the relationship between workload, stress, and decision fatigue; learning practical strategies to reduce it; and developing healthier work habits that support wellbeing and productivity.

What Is Decision Fatigue?

Dr Wahome explained that every decision — big or small — uses mental energy. As that energy becomes depleted, the ability to think critically, solve problems, and make sound judgements decreases. Decision fatigue is the deterioration in the quality of decisions made after a long period of decision-making — a state of mental exhaustion caused by making repeated choices throughout the day, leading to impulsivity, procrastination, and feeling overwhelmed.

He illustrated this simply: when a member of staff keeps returning to a manager asking the same question — and the manager eventually says, "do it whichever way you want" — that is not indifference. That is decision fatigue. The manager has made that decision so many times that the mental energy required to engage with it has been exhausted.

Fatigue more broadly, he explained, is a state of constant exhaustion that affects both the body and the mind. He identified four types:

- Physical fatigue — the body feels heavy, sluggish, and lacks energy to perform everyday tasks.
- Mental fatigue — described as "brain fog": difficulty concentrating, memory issues, slower cognitive processing, and a lack of motivation.
- Emotional fatigue — feeling emotionally drained, irritable, overwhelmed, or detached, with little patience left for others.
- Social fatigue — a deep sense of drain resulting from social interaction, where even small talk or presenting a friendly façade becomes overwhelming.

Effects of Decision Fatigue

Dr Wahome outlined the effects of decision fatigue at both the individual and organisational level:

ON INDIVIDUALS	ON ORGANISATIONS
• Increased stress levels • Mental exhaustion • Reduced concentration • Procrastination • Emotional irritability • Burnout risk	• Lower productivity • Poor judgment • Increased errors • Delayed decision-making • Reduced innovation • Lost opportunities • Reduced profits

The Brain Under Decision Overload

Dr Wahome took delegates through what happens inside the brain. The brain's executive functions are largely managed by the prefrontal cortex — the area located at the front of the brain, responsible for decision-making, planning and prioritisation, problem-solving, attention and concentration, emotional regulation, and self-control. This is the part of the brain, he said, that gets depleted when decision-making demands are high.

The brain requires energy to function, and that energy is consumed every time a decision is made. When it is depleted, the following outcomes occur:

BRAIN FUNCTION	POSSIBLE OUTCOME
Attention	Easily distracted and unable to focus
Memory	Forgetting details and commitments
Problem solving	Reduced creativity and critical thinking
Emotional regulation	Increased irritability and frustration
Judgment	Greater likelihood of poor choices
Self-control	More impulsive reactions and responses

Signs of Decision Fatigue

Dr Wahome grouped the signs of decision fatigue into three categories:

COGNITIVE SIGNS	EMOTIONAL SIGNS	BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS
• Difficulty concentrating • Forgetfulness • Indecisiveness • Poor judgment • Mental fog	• Irritability • Frustration • Anxiety • Feeling overwhelmed • Mood swings	• Procrastination • Avoiding decisions • Rushed decisions • Increased mistakes • Withdrawal from responsibilities

Common Workplace Triggers

Dr Wahome identified two categories of triggers:

ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS	PERSONAL FACTORS
• Excessive meetings • Constant interruptions • Information overload • Unrealistic deadlines • Multitasking culture • Lack of role clarity • Excessive emails and messages	• Stress outside work • Poor sleep and lack of breaks • Perfectionism • Financial stress • Caregiver burnout • Major life transitions (divorce, bereavement) • Relationship conflicts

Decision Fatigue vs Burnout — Understanding the Difference

Dr Wahome drew an important distinction between decision fatigue and burnout — two conditions that are related but clinically distinct:

DECISION FATIGUE	BURNOUT
Short-term mental depletion	Long-term psychological exhaustion
Caused by repeated decision-making leading to mental overload	Caused by chronic workplace stress
Primarily affects thinking and judgment	Affects emotions, motivation, and performance
Can improve after rest and recovery	Requires sustained recovery and workplace support
May occur daily	Develops gradually over time

Strategies for Managing Decision Fatigue

Dr Wahome presented practical strategies at two levels:

For individuals — protecting personal mental energy:

- Prioritise important decisions early in the day, when mental energy is highest.
- Reduce unnecessary choices — simplify daily routines wherever possible.
- Use routines and systems, including AI tools, to automate repetitive decisions.
- Take regular breaks throughout the working day.

- Practise mindfulness and stress management.
- Manage multitasking — avoid spreading attention across too many tasks simultaneously.
- Maintain healthy sleep habits and relationships.

For leaders — protecting team and organisational clarity:

- Creating clarity — Clearly define priorities and simplify processes to reduce the decision load on teams.
- Empowering teams — Delegate appropriately, encourage team autonomy, and reduce unnecessary approvals.
- Supporting wellbeing — Encourage breaks, monitor workloads actively, and promote psychological safety.

Prioritisation — The Eisenhower Matrix

Dr Wahome presented the Eisenhower Matrix as a practical tool for managing decision load. The matrix organises tasks into four quadrants by urgency and importance:

1 — IMPORTANT & URGENT Do it now.	**2 — IMPORTANT, NOT URGENT** Focus 80% of your effort here. Plan to do.
3 — URGENT, NOT IMPORTANT Delegate. Be wary — it feels important but is a deception.	**4 — NOT IMPORTANT, NOT URGENT** Eliminate. This is waste.

Protecting Executive Clarity and Building a Wellbeing-Friendly Workplace

Dr Wahome defined protecting executive clarity as shielding a leader's decision-making ability and focus from cognitive overload. It means ensuring that executives can think flexibly, lead without reactivity, and communicate clearly even during periods of high uncertainty or crisis. It covers three dimensions: cognitive and operational clarity — defending a leader's time and attention, using decision frameworks, setting boundaries and reducing distractions; digital and physical protection — proactively safeguarding executives from digital threats, harassment, and physical security risks; and communication and emotional intelligence — leading teams cohesively and managing stress to stay at an optimal cognitive level.

At the organisational level, he identified the characteristics of a healthy, wellbeing-friendly workplace:

- Clear communication channels.
- Limited unnecessary meetings.
- Focused work time promoted and protected.
- Reasonable workloads encouraged.
- Employee wellbeing actively supported.
- Collaboration and shared problem-solving fostered.
- Employee assistance programmes established.

Reflection — Questions for Every Leader

Dr Wahome closed with four reflection questions drawn from his session, which he invited every delegate to take back and sit with:

- What decisions consume most of your mental energy each day?
- When do you feel mentally exhausted at work?
- What unnecessary decisions could be simplified?
- What is one habit you can adopt to protect your mental energy this week?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Every decision consumes mental energy — protect it deliberately by prioritising important decisions early in the day.
2. Decision fatigue reduces judgment, productivity, and wellbeing — recognise the signs in yourself and your team before they escalate.
3. Decision fatigue can contribute to stress, anxiety, and burnout — address it early; the cost of not doing so falls on the organisation as well as the individual.
4. Leaders and employees share responsibility for managing mental energy — create systems, delegate, and reduce unnecessary decision load across the team.
5. Small changes in routine and workplace systems can significantly improve mental health and decision quality — start with one habit this week.
6. Establish or strengthen employee assistance programmes — psychological safety and access to support are markers of a healthy, high-performing organisation.

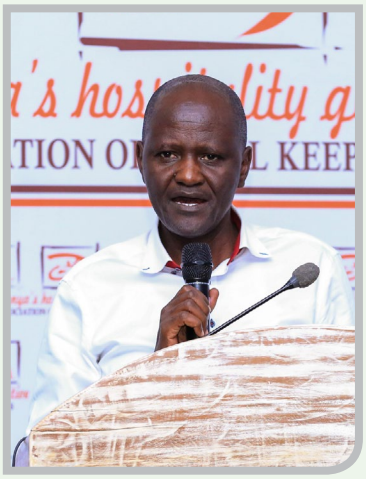
> "Mental wellbeing is not only about managing stress – it is also about managing the cognitive demands placed on our minds every day"
> *— Dr Stephen Wahome, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, M.P. Shah Hospital and Psychological Health Services*

Session **9**

Sustainable Tourism Financing: Leveraging the Tourism Fund for Growth

Speech by David Mwangi
Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Fund (TF):

Remarks read on his behalf by ***Mr Charles Okeyo,***
Director of Levy Services, Tourism Fund - Platinum Sponsor



Mr Charles Okeyo began his remarks with a direct framing: tourism does not grow simply because tourists arrive — it grows because someone invests before the tourist arrives. He noted that every hotel, lodge, conference centre, beach resort, conservancy, and attraction represented in the room exists because someone believed in Kenya's tourism potential enough to invest. He positioned the real question facing the industry not as whether tourism is growing, but whether that growth is being financed in a way that is sustainable, inclusive, and resilient enough to secure the industry for future generations.

The CEO's central message was a deliberate repositioning of how TF sees itself. TF, he said, exists to unlock investment, catalyse innovation, strengthen partnerships, and create an enabling environment for tourism businesses to thrive. He was explicit that the Fund should not be viewed merely as a financing institution, but as a strategic partner in the growth and transformation of Kenya's tourism industry — with every shilling invested expected to contribute to a stronger, more competitive, more resilient, and more sustainable sector. The speech outlined five specific areas where the TF has directed financing:

No	FINANCING AREA	WHAT THE FUND HAS SUPPORTED
1.	Strategic Tourism Infrastructure	Financing towards the Bomas of Kenya International Convention Centre project, strengthening Kenya's position as a premier MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) destination.
2.	Destination Marketing	Increased financing channelled through the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) to enhance Kenya's visibility in key source markets and attract more visitors.
3.	Skills Development	Expanded support for TVET-accredited institutions, equipping the next generation of tourism professionals with the knowledge and competencies a modern hospitality industry requires.

4.	Professional Development	Enhanced financing for refresher and professional development programmes through Kenya Utalii College, helping practitioners continuously improve service standards.
5.	Tourism Product Development	Increased support enabling diversification of tourism experiences and new opportunities for growth across the value chain.

The CEO framed these achievements as proof of what is possible when the industry works together and tourism financing is aligned with a clear vision for growth. His closing point was that sustainable tourism is not built by chance — it is built through deliberate investment, strong partnerships, and a shared commitment to the future. He invited the industry to reflect on how it can continue leveraging sustainable tourism financing to strengthen businesses, grow destinations, create jobs, and secure a vibrant and competitive tourism industry for generations to come

Session **10**

Attaining Sustainable Growth Through Effective Social Dialogue

By Jacqueline Mugo, MD/CEO
Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE)

Overview

Jacqueline Mugo, MD/CEO of the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE), opened by making the case for social dialogue as a competitiveness issue for hospitality, not a soft HR concern. Hospitality is a people-centred industry — technology cannot substitute for the warmth of welcome, service quality and staff professionalism, so a destination's reputation rests as much on workforce consistency as on its beaches, wildlife and infrastructure. Ms Mugo traced a direct line from trust to results: when employers and workers trust each other, service improves; when disputes are resolved early, productivity increases; when institutions function effectively, investor confidence grows and tourism flourishes. Ms Mugo then turned to the national picture — noting the sector's momentum, with accommodation and food services growing 15.6% last year, arrivals rising to approximately 2.55 million, bed nights up 12.6%, and 1.1 million direct and 3 million indirect jobs sustained — before stressing that sustaining this growth requires the same deliberate investment in social dialogue as in infrastructure, marketing and product development.

Key Points

- Hospitality is a people-centred industry where technology cannot substitute for human interaction — a destination's reputation rests as much on workforce consistency as on its natural assets, so employers must invest in healthy workplace relations as deliberately as in technology, equipment and marketing.
- Kenya's hospitality workforce is itself a recognised export of skill — Kenyans are found working in hotels across Europe and the UAE — but this mobility also represents a talent-retention risk for the domestic industry.
- Nationally, Kenya already has a long-standing social dialogue architecture — the 1962 Industrial Relations Charter, the Labour Institutions Act, the Employment and Labour Relations Court, and the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC)

— but the challenge is not the absence of institutions; it is ensuring they operate effectively.

- Despite this framework, five practical challenges continue to undermine social dialogue: rising intensity of labour disputes in essential services; slow dispute resolution at enterprise and industry level, despite improvements at the Employment and Labour Relations Court; underutilised and underfunded dialogue institutions, producing what Ms Mugo termed "consultation fatigue" — many meetings, limited outcomes; the need to harmonise and modernise the industrial relations framework; and the absence of a comprehensive national labour relations policy.
- International benchmarks — South Africa's National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), Singapore and Germany — show that where social dialogue is institutionalised, trust increases, conflict reduces, and productivity rises.
- Ms Mugo proposed six priority actions to strengthen social dialogue and support sustainable tourism growth (see Key Requests below).

> "Sustainable tourism growth requires sustainable social dialogue."
> *— Jacqueline Mugo, MD/CEO, Federation of Kenya Employers*

Beyond the six priority actions Ms Mugo tabled for the Symposium, three initiatives that are already in motion or under discussion that will shape the direction of Kenya's industrial relations framework in the near term:

WHAT'S IN THE PIPELINE		
Revised Industrial Relations Charter	**National Labour Relations Policy**	**Tripartite Working Group on AI & Future of Work**
The 1962 Charter is being revised to align with the Constitution, labour legislation and international labour standards, with ILO funding support.	A sessional paper is envisioned to give Kenya its first comprehensive labour relations policy, defining objectives, institutions and review mechanisms.	A proposed tripartite working group would bring government, employers and workers together to shape labour policy on digitalisation and AI.
ILO-funded — underway	**Policy pipeline**	**Proposed**

Key Requests

Ms Mugo closed by setting out six priority actions for constructive social dialogue and sustainable growth — four led by government, and two requiring wider tripartite and industry commitment:

To Government	To Industry & Stakeholders
• Finalise and adopt the revised Industrial Relations Charter, aligned with the Constitution, labour legislation and international labour standards. • Develop and adopt a comprehensive National Labour Relations Policy through a sessional paper. • Adequately resource the National Labour Board and Wages Councils, and operationalise the National Joint Consultative Council, the Tripartite Consultative Council and Works Councils envisaged under the 1962 Charter. • Establish a Tripartite Labour Market Statistics and Evidence Programme with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Labour, FKE, COTU and other stakeholders.	• Establish a Tripartite Working Group on the Future of Work and Digitalisation/AI, bringing government, employers and workers together to shape labour policy. • Continue strengthening Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), including advocacy to help the legal profession embrace it more fully.

Strengthening Labour-Relations Training Through Partnership

Ms Mugo raised the possibility of KAHC and FKE partnering to deliver stronger labour-relations training for the hospitality sector, noting that FKE's access to International Labour Organization (ILO) training programmes could benefit the industry. In response, KAHC Chief Executive Mike Macharia confirmed that the Association would take up this offer of joint training with FKE. He noted that KAHC already runs labour-focused training for HR managers and plans to extend this to General Managers and hotel owners, given that the labour component of revenue in the hotel industry — estimated at around 40% — is the highest of any sector of the economy.

Key Recommendations / Next Steps

- Finalise the revised Industrial Relations Charter and adopt a national labour relations policy to give Kenya a coherent, modern framework for industrial relations.
- Strengthen and resource dialogue institutions — the National Labour Board, Wages Councils and Tripartite Consultative Council — so disputes are resolved earlier, before escalating to litigation or industrial action.
- Deepen KAHC–FKE collaboration on labour-relations training, extending it beyond HR managers to General Managers and hotel owners.
- Benchmark against NEDLAC (South Africa), Singapore and Germany, where institutionalised social dialogue has strengthened trust, reduced conflict and raised productivity.
- Build, as pledged by Ms Mugo, a council of constructive engagement with trade unions and government, underpinned by mutual respect and shared responsibility.

"Where social dialogue is institutionalised, trust increases. Where trust increases, conflict reduces. And where conflict reduces, productivity rises."
— Jacqueline Mugo, MD/CEO, Federation of Kenya Employers

Plenary Discussion: Social Dialogue, Training and Industry Partnership

Ms Mugo's address opened the floor to a wide-ranging discussion, with delegates raising concerns spanning labour institutions, workforce training, industry funding, dispute resolution and the sector's exposure to political instability. Six issues emerged, one of which received a direct response from KAHC leadership.

Issue 1 — Operationalising the National Labour Board

A representative of the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers (KUDHEIHA) commended FKE for its work strengthening the instruments that guide and protect the labour market. He appealed for the National Labour Board to be brought into operation, arguing that this would help define the Wages Councils and give practical effect to the Industrial Relations Charter — instruments he described as critical to the industry. KUDHEIHA pledged to partner in this effort if called upon, so that a meaningful outcome can be achieved.

Issue 2 — Sustaining Investment in Training, and Addressing the Wage Gap

A representative of Kenya Utalii College (KUC) noted that the majority of hotel captains and technical staff in the room had trained at KUC, and reaffirmed the College's readiness to continue supporting the industry as a centre of excellence — provided the industry continues to invest in it in turn. He raised concern that graduates often enter the industry only to find the minimum wage on offer falls short of their expectations after professional training, and urged industry and social partners to address this gap, noting that motivated, fairly rewarded staff are less likely to leave the profession.

Issue 3 — Underfunding of Kenya Utalii College Under the Tourism Act 2013

Another participant argued that, notwithstanding its global reputation — KUC graduates are recruited directly by leading international hospitality employers, and its alumni can be found across the industry worldwide — the Tourism Fund has not adequately supported the College as envisaged under the Tourism Act 2013. He described this funding gap as undermining the sector's sustainability commitments and urged that it not be passed over in silence.

Issue 4 — Political and Civic Disruption to Tourism

The KUC representative also raised the impact of recent civic unrest on the sector, citing demonstrations in Nairobi that had disrupted movement across the city. He noted that similar disruption affects tourists travelling to the airport, undermining efforts to restore visitor and investor confidence. He called for the Symposium and the industry to engage political leaders, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and the police on the need for sustainable peace, cautioning that unresolved instability ahead of the 2027 elections could set the sector back by years, and proposed that industry stakeholders consider offshore discussions with investors to keep this concern visible.

Issue 5 — Strengthening the Coast Disputes Committee (ADR)

The chair of the Coast Disputes Committee (CDC) — an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) body established under the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between KAHC and KUDHEIHA — appealed for greater responsiveness from member establishments. He noted that letters seeking clarification on disputes sometimes go unanswered, which undermines the Committee's ability to resolve matters before they escalate to litigation, and asked for members' active support in engaging with the Committee.

Issue 6 — Involving the Political Class in Social Dialogue

A participant suggested that, having recognised the importance of social dialogue, KAHC and FKE should also find a way to involve the political class, describing this as one of the most valuable outcomes the Symposium could produce.

Response:

KAHC CEO Mike Macharia noted that the Association had tried this approach before, sponsoring parliamentary candidates in the 2007 general election — one linked to KUDHEIHA in Kisumu, and two others in Budalangi and Langata. All three were elected, but only one proved an effective advocate for the industry, sitting on Parliament's Tourism, Trade and Finance committees and championing the sector's policy priorities; the other two aligned more closely with government and did not advance the industry's cause. The effective advocate did not seek re-election in the following cycle. Mr Macharia indicated KAHC would be open to trying this approach again.

Plenary Sessions

Plenary Sessions

Session **11**

Social Security and the Pursuit of Sustainable Saving

By Nelson Tonui, Regional Manager
Coast Region, National Social Security Fund (NSSF) - Platinum Sponsor

Overview

Nelson Tonui, NSSF's Regional Manager for the Coast Region, set out the case for stronger retirement saving in the hospitality sector, tracing the Fund's transformation from a government department in 1965 to a modern, earnings-based social security provider under the NSSF Act of 2013. His central message: after decades of stagnant contributions, Kenya is only now catching up to international norms — and hospitality employers, whose casual and seasonal workforce is often left out of pension coverage, have a particular responsibility to close the gap.

Key Points

- Social protection refers to the policies, programmes and legislative measures designed to protect citizens from life-cycle vulnerabilities, poverty, dependency in old age, and a poor savings culture — including NSSF programmes such as Nyota and Haba Haba, and the legislative anchor of the NSSF Act of 2013.
- NSSF's own transformation has been slow: a government department in 1965, a state corporation in 1987, and only in 2014 did the NSSF Act No. 45 move the Fund to a progressive, earnings-based system — with phased implementation beginning in February 2023.
- Contribution levels stagnated for decades — 24 years between 1977 and 2001, and a further 22 years between 2001 and 2023 — before the phased implementation of the 2013 Act began rapidly raising the mandatory pension contribution, reaching KES 12,960 currently.
- Even after this increase, Kenya's combined pension contribution rate of 12% remains the lowest among comparable economies, behind Uganda (15%), Ethiopia (16%), Ghana (18.5%), Tanzania (20%), India (24%), the UK (25.8%) and Brazil (34.8%).

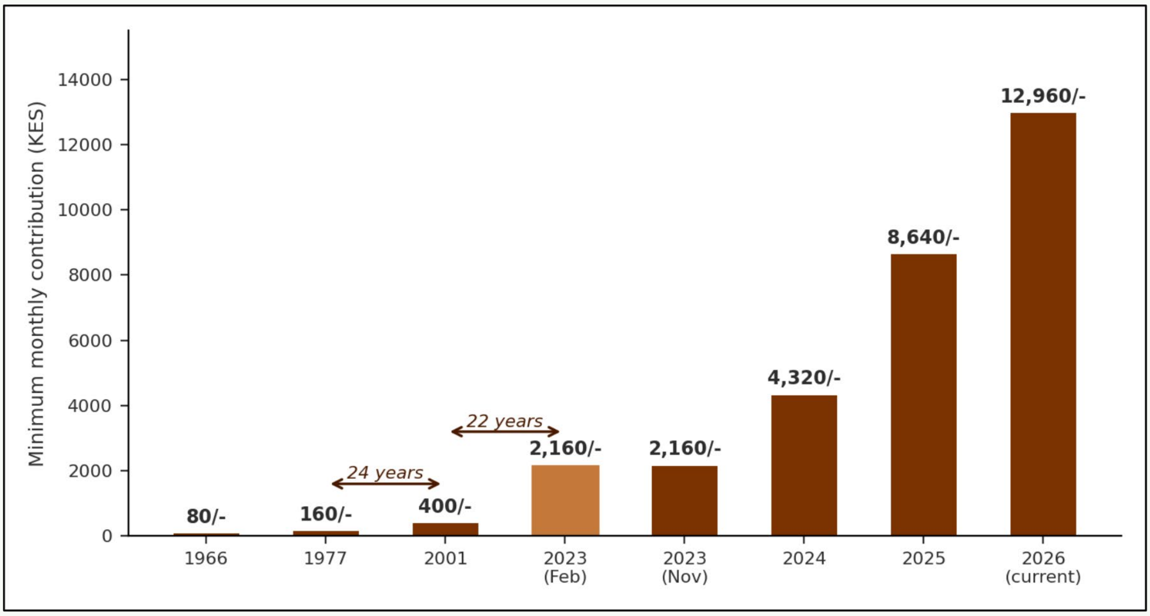
- Employers — including domestic employers, sole proprietors, public bodies and private companies — are obligated to register all employees with NSSF, maintain accurate earnings records, produce records on demand, deduct contributions correctly, and submit monthly returns with remittances.
- NSSF offers members six benefits (age/retirement, withdrawal, survivors, invalidity, emigration and funeral grant), backed by a government guarantee, tax-deductible contributions, competitive returns (17% declared for 2024/25), a KES 600 billion-plus investment portfolio, and a governance structure with FKE and Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU) represented on the Board.
- In the hospitality sector specifically, 1,312 employers are currently active in the NSSF system against an estimated 3,000 registered in the sector — compliance of roughly 40% — even though the accommodation and food services sector alone employs 102,900 formal workers and supports over a million further jobs.

NSSF's Transformational Journey

NSSF'S TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY			
1965 Established under Sessional Paper No. 10 as a government department.	**1965** Established under Sessional Paper No. 10 as a government department.	**1965** Established under Sessional Paper No. 10 as a government department.	**1965** Established under Sessional Paper No. 10 as a government department.

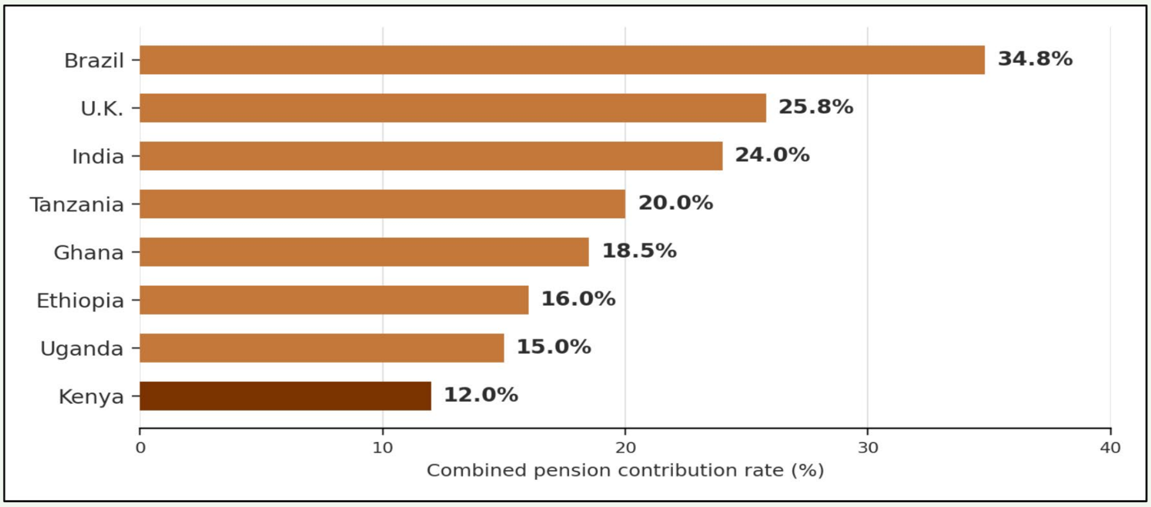
Contribution Growth: From Stagnation to Rapid Increase

Mandatory monthly pension contributions stagnated for 46 of the last 60 years before the NSSF Act of 2013 began phased implementation in 2023 — since when contributions have risen six-fold in three years.



How Kenya Compares

Even after recent increases, Kenya's combined pension contribution rate remains the lowest among the countries NSSF benchmarked itself against.



What Members Receive — Six NSSF Benefits

Age/Retirement Benefit Paid from age 55 — the primary retirement benefit, providing income security in old age.	**Withdrawal Benefit** Available to members aged 50 and above who have left employment.	**Survivors Benefit** Paid to surviving relatives of a deceased member.
Invalidity Benefit Paid to members certified permanently incapable of working due to physical or mental disability.	**Emigration Benefit** Paid to members emigrating from Kenya to a country outside the East African Community, without intending to return.	**Funeral Grant** A compassionate benefit paid to a dependant relative registered under the Old Fund.

Snapshot of NSSF's Reach:

9 Regional offices, 64 branches and 59 Huduma Centres nationwide	**102,900** Formal employees in accommodation & food services	**~40%** Compliance rate among the sector's estimated 3,000 registered employers

Rallying Call: Three Commitments

Mr Tonui closed with a direct appeal to the hospitality sector, framed as three commitments NSSF is inviting KAHC to join:

- Every hospitality employer to comply with the provisions of the NSSF Act of 2013.
- Register and contribute for all casual and seasonal employees, not only permanent staff.
- KAHC and NSSF to collaborate on ensuring compliance with the NSSF Act of 2013, so that hospitality workers can retire in dignity.

Plenary Discussion: Investment Transparency, Compliance and the Legal Path Forward

Following Mr Tonui's presentation, the floor was opened for questions to NSSF. Four questions were raised, covering the composition of NSSF's investment portfolio, compliance among government agencies, the Fund's declared returns, and the legal uncertainty surrounding the NSSF Act following the Supreme Court's ruling. NSSF responded directly to each, before KAHC CEO Mike Macharia, who is also a member of the NSSF Board/Trustee, added a detailed follow-up covering the Fund's investment strategy, its engagement with non-compliant agencies, and the legal history behind the ongoing court process.

Issue 1 — Understanding NSSF's "Solid, Impressive" Investment Portfolio

A participant asked Mr Tonui to clarify what it meant by describing its portfolio as "solid, sound and impressive," and where specifically member contributions were invested to generate the Fund's declared 17% return.

Response:

Mr Tonui explained that its portfolio is deliberately diversified — spanning quoted equities, treasury bonds and infrastructure bonds — to remain risk-averse and insulated from the performance of any single asset class. The Fund confirmed its declared return rose from 11% the previous year to 17% this year, and said returns are continuing to trend upward.

Mike Macharia added further detail: NSSF's total fund size stands at approximately KES 750 billion, up from KES 350 billion before the 2023 reforms — effectively doubling in two years — and is projected to reach roughly KES 800 billion by the end of this fiscal year and KES 1 trillion the following year. He noted that Retirement Benefits Authority (RBA) and Capital Markets Authority (CMA) rules require 60–70% of the portfolio to be held in government securities, with the remainder allocated to quoted equities such as Safaricom, KCB, Equity Bank and Standard Chartered — Safaricom shares bought at around KES 20 are now trading near KES 34 — as well as offshore private equity investments, including student-accommodation developer ACON, and participation in major IPOs such as Safaricom and Kenya Pipeline. By comparison, he noted, Uganda's scheme — established a decade earlier, in 2013 — currently returns 15% on gross contributions.

Issue 2 — Compliance Among Government Agencies and Parastatals

Another participant asked whether the reported failure of some parastatals and semi-government corporations to remit statutory deductions was a problem affecting NSSF.

Response:

Mr Tonui said it maintains a dedicated compliance unit that follows up on non-remitting agencies, and stated that it does not currently face serious compliance issues among its public-sector clients specifically.

Mr Macharia elaborated that NSSF engages non-compliant government agencies directly rather than litigating them, under what he described as a "one-government approach." This engagement has recovered approximately KES 450 billion overall, including KES 6 billion from the Teacher Service Commission alone. He suggested NSSF has not told this success story well enough, and urged the Fund to publicise it more actively — particularly to tourism sector investors.

Issue 3 — Legal Uncertainty Following the Supreme Court Ruling

Robert Waruiru asked NSSF to clarify the confusion around whether the new contribution rates currently apply, following a public notice on contributions and the Supreme Court's decision to remit the matter back to a lower court, and questioned the hierarchy of law governing the dispute.

Response:

Mr Tonui said it could not comment on the substance of the matter while the court process remains active, but noted that both COTU and FKE — the social partners represented on its Board — have taken public positions and guided their members accordingly, which it considers the appropriate way forward in the interim.

Mr Macharia gave an extended account of the litigation's path: the Employment and Labour Relations Court (ELRC) had ruled the NSSF Act unconstitutional, on the basis that, as legislation affecting counties, it should have gone through the Senate. The Court of Appeal then held that the ELRC lacked jurisdiction to make that determination. The Supreme Court subsequently confirmed the ELRC did have jurisdiction, but declined to rule on the substantive issues itself, remitting the matter back to the Court of Appeal to be canvassed — which in practice returns the question to the High Court.

He noted the practical complexity this creates: contributions have been collected and benefits paid — including the new 17% return — since the Act took effect, and Kenyan labour law's principle against the withdrawal of already-paid benefits sits in tension with any suggestion that contributions or gratuity should now be clawed back. He cited KAHC's 2014 Collective Bargaining Agreement with KUDHEIHA, under which gratuity was phased out once the NSSF Act took effect, leaving affected members and employers in what he called "legal entanglement" between the CBA, the courts, and professional legal opinion. FKE's position, he said, is that member companies should not withdraw benefits already extended to staff, since contributing to a worker's savings is not a criminal act.

He illustrated the human stakes with his own mother's experience — retiring at 55 after 30 years of contributing at KES 200 a month, and receiving a payout of KES 144,000 — as a reason the higher contribution rates, however contested procedurally, address a genuine inadequacy in the old regime.

Session **12**

Developing & Growing Sustainable Tourism in the Kenya Coast Region: A Policy Perspective

By Mohamed Osman Ali
Tourism & Wildlife Caucus: Chairman, Mombasa County CECM for Tourism, Culture, and Trade

Speaking in his capacity as Mombasa County's CECM for Trade, Tourism and Culture, and as Chairman of the Tourism & Wildlife Caucus representing Kenya's six coastal counties, Mr Osman Ali framed the Symposium's theme — "Sustainable Tourism Growth for Global Excellence" — as a call to move from rhetoric to actionable policy. He noted that the Kenya Coast holds the entirety of the country's coastline and anchors its beach tourism product, but argued that long-term competitiveness will be defined not by visitor volume alone, but by the quality of governance, the resilience of coastal ecosystems, and the equity of the tourism economic model. He presented the policy interventions that follow not as county initiatives, but as a unified coastal agenda for national implementation.

Eleven Policy Areas for Sustainable Coastal Tourism

Mr Osman Ali set out eleven policy areas for the six coastal counties (Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Lamu, Tana River, and Taita Taveta), each with a stated objective and a set of policy actions:

#	Policy Area	Objective
1	Sustainable Coastal and Marine Resource Management	Protect beaches, coral reefs, mangroves, marine parks, and other natural tourism assets
2	Community-Based Tourism	Ensure local communities benefit directly from tourism
3	Blue Economy and Marine Tourism	Position the Coast as Africa's leading blue tourism destination
4	Tourism Product Diversification	Reduce dependence on beach tourism
5	Climate Change and Tourism Resilience	Protect tourism investments from climate risks
6	Tourism Investment and Incentives	Attract sustainable tourism investment

7	Regional Coastal Tourism Integration	Promote the Coast as a single tourism destination
8	Tourism Skills Development	Build a globally competitive tourism workforce
9	Sustainable Beach Management	Maintain clean, safe, and attractive beaches
10	Data, Research and Smart Tourism	Support evidence-based decision-making
11	Air Access and Destination Connectivity	Improve international and domestic connectivity

Selected policy actions under Community-Based Tourism included requiring tourism investors to incorporate local employment targets, supporting community-owned enterprises, and establishing tourism enterprise funds for youth and women, with an expected outcome of increasing local tourism income retention to over 50%. Under Product Diversification, he called for developing cultural, heritage, sports, eco-, MICE, agro-, and film tourism, targeting non-beach tourism at 50% of coastal revenues by 2035.

Deep Dive: Air Access and Destination Connectivity

Of the eleven policy areas, Air Access carried the most developed economic case. Mr Osman Ali argued that the Coast's constraint is not a lack of tourism product, but insufficient access: Moi International Airport recorded 235,184 international arrivals in 2025 (+14.7% year-on-year, 9.2% of Kenya's international arrivals) — yet Zanzibar, offering a similar beach and heritage product, received approximately one million international visitors in the same year, a gap he attributed to Zanzibar's liberalised charter and scheduled flight access.

To make the case concrete, he cited industry modelling of what added flight capacity into the Coast would be worth economically, under two scenarios:

Estimated Annual Impact	Scenario A: +4 flights/week	Scenario B: +7 flights/week
New international visitors per year	31,450	—
Additional GDP generated	KES 12.1 billion	KES 21.1 billion
New jobs supported	Over 17,000	30,000
Additional tax revenue	KES 1.7 billion	KES 3 billion

In plain terms: adding just four extra international flights a week into the Coast — roughly one more flight every two days — would already be worth over KES 12 billion a year and 17,000 jobs. Nearly doubling that increase to seven flights a week would in turn nearly double the economic return, to over KES 21 billion and 30,000 jobs.

Air Access: Policy Recommendations

- Liberalise charter and scheduled international flight access to coastal airports
- Expand Bilateral Air Services Agreements with key European, Middle Eastern and emerging source markets
- Ring-fence Kenya Tourism Board route-development funding to support direct international flights to the Coast
- Incentivise airlines to establish year-round direct routes to coastal destinations

- Coordinate national and county governments in developing a dedicated Coastal Air Connectivity Strategy

Vision 2029

Mr Osman Ali set out an ambition to attract one million international visitors annually to the Coast by 2029 — 20% of Kenya's national target of 5.5 million international visitors — generating an estimated USD 3 billion in annual GDP impact and supporting approximately 550,000 jobs.

> "The future of tourism in Kenya's coastal counties lies not in increasing visitor numbers alone, but in adopting policies that create higher value, protect ecosystems, empower communities, and strengthen resilience. Sustainable tourism must become the foundation upon which the Coast's economic transformation and Blue Economy ambitions are built."
> *— Mohamed Osman Ali, Chairman, Tourism & Wildlife Caucus; Mombasa County CECM for Tourism, Culture, and Trade*

Remarks by the County Government Representative – Kilifi County

Hon. Raymond Ngala

County Executive Committee Member Trade, Tourism Promotion, Culture and Heritage, and Cooperative Development — Kilifi County

Hon. Raymond Ngala, County Executive Committee Member for Trade, Tourism Promotion, Culture and Heritage, and Cooperative Development, welcomed delegates to Kilifi County on behalf of the County Government. He recognised the role of KAHC in creating an enabling environment within the tourism workspace along the Kenyan coast, describing the Symposium as an opportunity to exchange ideas, strengthen networks, and build a more resilient tourism industry.

Hon. Ngala welcomed delegates to Kilifi County, noting that the County is home to over 1,008 hotels, resorts, boutique lodges, villas, serviced apartments, and holiday homes that provide world-class hospitality to visitors throughout the year. He highlighted that Kilifi County ranks second nationally, after Nairobi, in licensed bed capacity, with 14,997 licensed beds representing approximately 11.1 per cent of Kenya's total bed capacity. He congratulated every hotel owner, tourism entrepreneur, and investor in the county for making this possible.

1,008	**2nd**	**14,997**
hotels, resorts, lodges, villas, serviced apartments and holiday homes in Kilifi County	nationally in licensed bed capacity, after Nairobi	licensed beds — approximately 11.1% of Kenya's total bed capacity

Hon. Ngala was direct on a guiding principle: tourism does not thrive through government effort alone, but through public-private partnerships. He cited a recent example to demonstrate this in practice — last year, Kilifi County partnered with the Uganda Consulate in Mombasa and key tourism stakeholders to organise the 4th Uganda–Kenya Coast Tourism Conference, which he described as a success. He was clear that this milestone would not have been possible without industry collaboration, noting that the support of stakeholders transformed the conference into a strategic marketing success.

In recognition of growing global competition for tourists, Hon. Ngala announced that the County Government of Kilifi has established the Kilifi Tourism Board, which is now fully operational. The Board is expected to coordinate destination branding and marketing, and to facilitate strategic partnerships in positioning Kilifi as a premier tourism destination.

Hon. Ngala congratulated the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers (KAHC) for its outstanding role in advancing the growth, sustainability, and resilience of Kilifi's tourism and hospitality industry, crediting the Association with helping transform the sector into what it is today in the county.

In closing, Hon. Ngala reaffirmed the commitment of the County Government of Kilifi to building stronger partnerships with every stakeholder represented at the Symposium. He called on all tourism stakeholders to continue working hand in hand with the County Government and the Kilifi Tourism Board in marketing Kilifi as a preferred tourism destination, and wished delegates fruitful engagements, networking, a successful AGM, and success to the golfers among them.

> "Tourism does not thrive through government effort alone, but through public-private partnerships."
> *— Hon. Raymond Ngala, county Executive Committee Member, Trade, Tourism Promotion, Culture and Heritage, and Cooperative Development, Kilifi County*

Remarks by Kenya Utalii College CEO

By Mr Mark Rachuonyo Ogendi
CEO, Kenya Utalii College

Mr Mark Rachuonyo Ogendi, CEO of Kenya Utalii College, addressed delegates with a brief presentation, opening by thanking the employers and partners present for the opportunities they provide Kenya Utalii College students. He was direct about the institution's significance: Kenya Utalii College is not merely a college, but an institution of policy. He warned that if it is undermined, Kenya will be forced to import chefs, guides, and managers in future — resulting in lost jobs for locals and lost foreign exchange.

Mr Ogendi shared a progress report highlighting the College's milestones over the past year, summarised in the three figures below: the anniversary being marked this year, the growth in trainee numbers following the launch of a new training feature, and the volume of refresher and management development training delivered to the industry in 2026.

50 YEARS	Anniversary celebrated this year	**120** TRAINERS	Up from 32, via new individual training feature launched December	**2,414** REFRESHER COURSES	Delivered to industry in 2026, plus 500 management development programmes

Mr Ogendi highlighted a growing web of international partnerships strengthening the College's training, equipment, and global reach. The table below summarises each partner country, the embassy or institution involved, and the nature of the support or collaboration in place:

TURKEY: World-class barista training equipment; achievement award from the Turkish Embassy, Nairobi	**CHINA:** Hosted the World Chefs Global Chefs Competition (Chinese Chefs) 2025, officiated by the Chinese government	**SOUTH KOREA:** Korean Embassy partnership, with a further meeting scheduled
ITALY: Three-year research and training partnership on health and safety for tourism workers, with Strathmore University and IHDI	**OMAN:** 50 students placed, with the country seeking more	**SIERRA LEONE & ESTONIA:** Emerging partnerships for student exchange in both directions
UNITED KINGDOM: Recent accreditation by the World Chefs body		

Call to Action — Mr Ogendi announced that starting the following week, the College would be reaching out to industry stakeholders directly to ask what they want from Kenya Utalii College to make it a "perfect institution." He invited the industry's continued engagement ahead of the College's 50th anniversary celebrations, which he said would involve all stakeholders present.

Closing Remarks & Appreciation

By Cathrine Murage

National Treasurer, KAHC

Cathrine Murage brought the 2026 Symposium to a close on Day Two, thanking every delegate for the time taken to attend and remain present for the full two days, acknowledging that each person had chosen to be there over other competing demands on their time.

She extended particular appreciation to the KAHC Secretariat team for their work in organising the event, recognising the significant financial and logistical effort required to deliver the two-day Symposium, and offering thanks for their patience with the many calls and follow-ups made throughout the planning process.

With the appreciations delivered, she declared the 2026 KAHC Symposium closed.

Partners


NSSF


DStv
for business


DStv
for business


Sustainable Tourism Growth for Global Excellence


BOMA INTERNATIONAL HOSPITALITY COLLEGE
BIHC

Partners

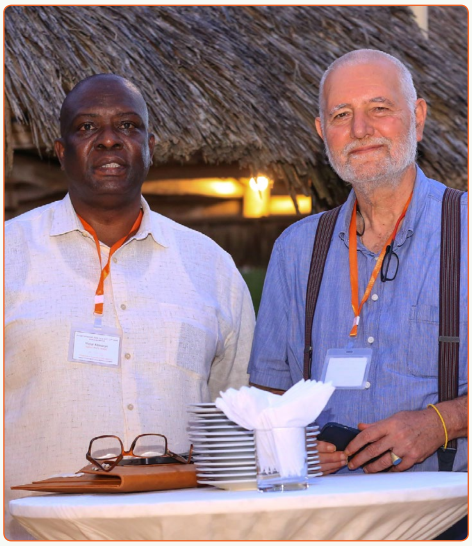

KENYA UTALII COLLEGE


Brookside
Goodness for all


institute
Creating the Professionals' Club
PASSIONATE STUDENTS
EXPERIENCED FACULTY

Media Engagement

Cocktail












Gala Dinner

Gala Dinner

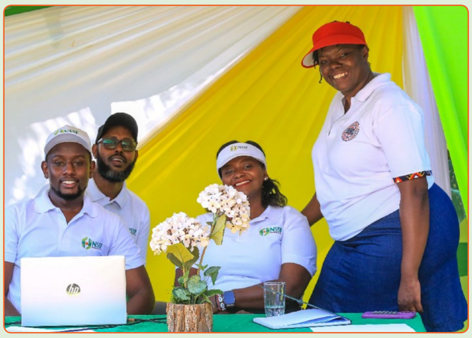









Golf Tournament



Golf Tournament

Appendix 1

Symposium Agenda

Day One: Thursday 25th June 2026

TIME	ACTIVITY	ACTOR
08:00 – 08:15 a.m.	Registration	KAHC Secretariat
08:15 – 08:20 a.m.	Welcome Address	**Chief Executive Mike Macharia** invites the KAHC National Chairman to make introductory remarks.
08:20 – 08:30 a.m.	Introduction	**National Chairman Mr. Christopher Musau,** Introduction of KAHC Board; Recognition of Partners & Sponsors; Symposium Highlights.
08:30 – 08:45 a.m.	Remarks and Welcome to Kilifi County	**H.E Gideon Maitha Mung'aro,** Governor, Kilifi County
08:45 – 09:00 a.m.	Remarks and Welcome of the Chief Guest	**Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok,** Principal Secretary, State Department of Tourism
09:00 – 09:30 a.m.	Keynote Address	**Chief Guest, Hon. Rebecca Miano,** Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife
9:30 – 10:00 a.m.	**Global Tourism Leadership Through WTTC:** Strategies for Kenya To Strengthen Sustainability and Competitiveness	**Hon. Najib Balala,** Executive Vice President for Advocacy, Government Affairs and Research, WTTC
D I S C U S S I O N		
GROUP PHOTO / TEA BREAK / TOUR OF THE EXHIBITION STANDS		
11:00 – 11:30 a.m.	**Artificial Intelligence in Hospitality:** Driving Sustainable Tourism and Enhancing Guest Experience	**Dr. Joseph Sevilla,** Director of @iLabAfrica Research Centre, Strathmore University
11:30 – 12:00 p.m.	*Social Protection and the Pursuit of Sustainable Savings*	National Social Security Fund
12:00 – 12:15 p.m.	Connecting your Business to profits.	Head of DSTV Business, Multichoice Kenya.
12:15 – 12:45 p.m.	Impact of the Finance Bill on Sustainable Tourism Growth	**Robert Waruiru,** Partner and Head of Tax, Ichiban Tax & Business Advisory LLP
12:45 – 01:00 p.m.	Building Sustainable Business Partnerships	Brookside
D I S C U S S I O N		
L U N C H B R E A K		
02:15 – 02:30 p.m.	The Role of Education and Training in Building Sustainable Businesses	Boma International Hospitality College (BIHC)
02:30 – 03:00 p.m.	Strengthening Destination Resilience in an Era of Global Uncertainty	**Dr. Albert Kariuki,** Director, Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre – East Africa
03:00– 03:30 p.m.	**Regenerative Hospitality:** Building Tourism That Gives Back More Than It Takes	**Colin Johnson, PhD**, Professor, Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management, San Francisco State University.
03:30 –04:00 p.m.	**Decision Fatigue and Mental Health:** Protecting Executive Clarity and Workforce Wellbeing	**Dr. Stephen Wahome,** Director, Psychological Health Services
D I S C U S S I O N		
04:30 – 05:00 p.m.	Wrap up Day One	

TEA BREAK — All delegates (05:00 p.m.)	
WELCOME COCKTAIL — All delegates (07:00 p.m.)	

Day Two: Friday 26th June 2026

TIME	ACTIVITY	ACTOR
08:00 – 8:15 a.m.	Registration	KAHC Secretariat
08:15 – 08:30 a.m.	Welcome Address	**Chief Executive Mike Macharia;** Recognition of Partners & Sponsors.
08:30 – 08:45 a.m.	**Sustainable Tourism Financing:** *Leveraging the Tourism Fund for Growth*	**David Mwangi,** Ag. Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Fund
08:45 –09:15 a.m.	Attaining Sustainable Growth Through Effective Social Dialogue	**Jacqueline Mugo,** MD/CEO Federation of Kenya Employers
09:15 – 09:45 a.m.	**Branding Kenya as a Sustainable Destination:** *Harnessing Culture, Nature, and Innovation for Global Competitiveness*	**June Chepkemei,** CEO/Managing Director, Kenya Tourism Board
09:45 –10:15 a.m.	**Developing and Growing Sustainable Tourism in the Coast region:** *Policy perspective*	**Mohamed Osman Ali,** Tourism & Wildlife Caucus: Chairman, Mombasa County CECM for Tourism, Culture, and Trade
DISCUSSION AND WRAP-UP		
TEA BREAK/TOUR OF THE EXHIBITION STANDS		
11:15 – 1:00 p.m.	KAHC AGM	KAHC Members
LUNCH BREAK		
GALA DINNER (DRESS CODE: AFRICAN) — 07:00 p.m.		

Day Three: Saturday 27th June 2026 — KAHC Golf Tournament, Malindi Golf Club

TIME	ACTIVITY	ACTOR
09:00– 9:30 a.m.	Registration	KAHC Secretariat
09:30 – 05:00 p.m.	KAHC Golf Tournament	Malindi Golf Club
7:00 p.m.	Prize Giving Dinner	Malindi Golf Club

Appendix 2

Delegate Questions Submitted via Menti.com

During the Symposium, delegates submitted questions and comments to presenters in real time via Menti.com. The submissions below have been grouped by subject area for ease of reference; wording has been lightly cleaned for clarity but reflects delegates' own submissions.

Air Access & Aviation Infrastructure

- Should Kenyan cities and towns be encouraged to pursue independent tourism marketing, given how cities in Spain and Italy are now grappling with overtourism?
- The one thing government can do to grow the numbers is enhance air connectivity, especially to Mombasa — "we cannot bring the numbers without capacity to fly them in. Open the skies."
- What is government doing to increase international air access — can air space licences be increased to attract more international travellers?
- What steps is the national government taking to open up international air access to Mombasa International Airport?
- The Malindi International Airport upgrade has been elusive and is desperately needed — what is holding it up?

Roads & Physical Infrastructure

- How can enabler agencies be pushed to support the industry through infrastructure improvement — e.g., Diani Beach Road under KERRA, sections of which remain in poor condition for a leading beach destination?

Public Health & Destination Confidence (Ebola)

- Can government clarify the widely publicised information on the Ebola quarantine centre in Laikipia, given its significant impact on tourism? What is being done to restore confidence in the country?
- How will the Ministry respond to the Ebola issue — the sector is already experiencing far too many cancellations as a result?

Training, Skills & Capacity Building

- Are there any timelines for when Ronald Ngala Utalii College will open?
- There is urgent need for capacity building, yet Utalii College is down and Ronald Ngala College seems stalled — how long will it take to open Ronald Ngala College and finance Utalii College?
- Funding for Kenya Utalii College continues to diminish — is there a reason, given KUC trains for the world?
- Given the Tourism Fund's original objective was to fund hotel training, what is the new strategy for funding hotel training since that objective has effectively been disrupted since 1997?

Technology & Artificial Intelligence

- How can data protection and security be ensured when using AI, and can government be encouraged to include AI in school and college curricula?
- Since AI is not necessarily accurate, given the data it learns from, what is a viable solution to ensuring accuracy?

Taxation & the Finance Act 2026

- To Robert Waruiru, on visa cards: does the change mean individual cardholders will bear higher costs, or is it merchants who are affected?
- Is the VAT special table now a thing of the past?
- On tax: the core problem is the fiscal deficit — why is the focus on increasing revenue (taxation) rather than a combined effort on reducing government expenditure and addressing corruption?

Governance, Political Rhetoric & Investor Confidence

- How can negative, abusive political rhetoric be tamed or stopped, given it chases away investors and tourists?

Sector Strategy, Marketing & Future Readiness

- What are the three most important actions hospitality captains and industry associations must take to deliver the theme of sustainable tourism growth for global excellence?
- How is the sector preparing for the next generation of travellers — or are experiences still being designed for yesterday's guests?

Partner & Service Provider Relations

- DStv is perceived as taking customers for granted — disconnections without clear reason, disputed arrears claims, and charges considered excessive.

Appendix 3

Media Report

Making Kenya's hospitality globally competitive

KENYA ASSOCIATION OF HOTEL KEEPERS

MEDIA COVERAGE REPORT

riverwood

JUNE 2026	ADVERTISING VALUE	PR VALUE
PRINT	KES. 1,620,680	KES. 4, 862,040
BROADCAST	KES. 4,712,580	KES. 14,137,740
ONLINE	KES. 3,988,460	KES. 11,965,380
TOTAL	**KES. 10,321,720**	**KES. 30.965,160**


Business Daily

Dairy |

Brookside steps up hotelier partnerships in growth plan


DAILY NATION

Dairy

Brookside steps up deals with hoteliers in growth drive


The Standard SINCE 1902

Firm revs up partnership with hoteliers to expand niche market


People Daily

Brookside revs up partnership with hoteliers to expand niche

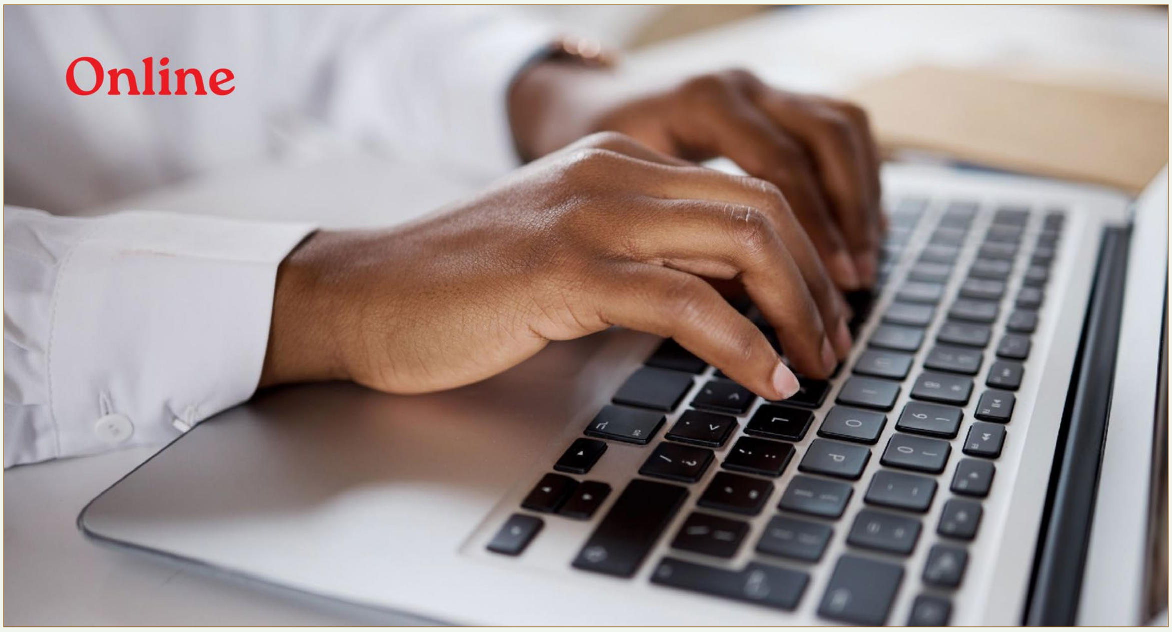

THE STAR

Brookside taps hotel industry to expand niche market


THE STAR

Government steps up push for five million international tourists

Published Date	Source	Title	Time	SOV
25th June 2026	Kaya Radio	Kenya is safe for tourism destination	1940hrs	0:01:20
26th June 2026	Citizen Radio	Bitok pledges readiness of tourism college	0800hrs	0:01:44
26th June 2026	Hope FM	Kenya to review airline restrictions to boost tourism	1640hrs	0:00:50
26th June 2026	Kass FM	PS Bitok reassures tourists as sector battles Ebola-related cancellations	0803hrs	0:00:42
26th June 2026	Radio 47	Julius Bitok dismisses Ebola rumours in Kenya	1700hrs	0:01:00
26th June 2026	Nenyon TV	Government assures Toursits Kenya is Ebola free urges them to Visit without Fear	1843hrs	0:02:05
26th June 2026	K24	Kenya Ebola Preparedness	1300hrs	0:02:30
26th June 2026	KBC TV	Ebola Management	1330hrs	0:02:36
26th June 2026	KBC TV	Ebola Management	1930hrs	0:02:49
26th June 2026	TV47	Ebola Preparedness	1105hrs	0:01:55
26th June 2026	KUTV	Toursim PS dismisses fears of an Ebola outbreak in Kenya	1930hrs	0:03:55
26th June 2026	KUTV	Toursim PS dismisses fears of an Ebola outbreak in Kenya	2130hrs	0:03:53
26th June 2026	BFM Radio	Kenya's Hospitality stakeholders meet in Malindi	1300hrs	0:02:55



Published Date	Source	Title
25th June 2026	Streamline	Brookside Dairy Targets Kenya's Hospitality Sector in Aggressive Market Growth Drive
25th June 2026	The Online Kenyan	Brookside revs up partnership with hoteliers to expand niche market
25th June 2026	Business Daily	Brookside steps up partnerships with hoteliers in growth drive
25th June 2026	K24	Kenya safe from Ebola, government assures tourists and citizens
25th June 2026	Radio Kaya	https://www.facebook.com/100057913067260/posts/1411414120799010/?rdid=xFeAbozfhWEoMvjm#
25th June 2026	BD Africa	https://x.com/BD_Africa/status/2070117301907853346
25th June 2026	BD Africa	https://www.facebook.com/BusinessDailyAfrica/posts/milk-processor-brookside-has-stepped-up-its-partnership-with-hospitality-outlets/1529516115855614/
26th June 2026	Kenya News Digital	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSrx18PqG6s
26th June 2026	Capital FM	Govt to ease airlines restrictions to boost tourist arrivals to 5mn
26th June 2026	KUTV	https://x.com/kutv_kenya/status/2070577270830288916
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26th June 2026	Uzalendo News	https://www.facebook.com/Uzalendonews/posts/stop-rumour-mongering-tourism-ps-julius-bitok-assures-tourists-kenya-is-complete/1656986402459066/
26th June 2026	KNA	Government-steps-up-efforts-to-attract-five-million-tourism
26th June 2026	Nenyon TV	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5QxX30aK-Y
26th June 2026	KBC Digital	PS Bitok reassures tourists as sector battles Ebola-related cancellations
26th June 2026	Go Places Digital	Kenya's Hospitality Giants Unite In Malindi For KAHC Symposium
26th June 2026	TV47	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vhp_sh-kalQ
26th June 2026	KBC TV	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3PU6inQmfM
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26th June 2026	KU TV	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWs76hCCUxs
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26th June 2026	The Coast	Kenya Declares Itself Ebola-Free as Tourism Sector Targets 5 Million Visitors
26th June 2026	The Standard Media	Brookside-revs-up-partnership-with-hoteliers-to-expand-niche-market
27th June 2026	The Star	Brookside-taps-hotel-industry-to-expand-niche-market
27th June 2026	KNA	KENYA DECLARES EBOLA FREE STATUS, ASSURES TOURISTS AS THE GOVERNMENT TARGETS 5 MILLION VISITORS
27th June 2026	Mwendani FM	https://www.facebook.com/reel/1400524655234334

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