

Print Media Awareness Campaign on Impacts of Climate Change in Africa

**By Apolinary Tairo, Journalist
and eTurboNews Representative, Tanzania**

Introduction

Tanzania is considered one of the premier tourism destinations in Africa with its wildlife and coastal attractions providing the second-largest source of foreign exchange. More than 25% of Tanzania's surface area is devoted to conservation of some of the world's greatest concentrations of large mammals (including elephants), a variety of birds and indigenous flora. Wildlife is one of the most valuable resources of Tanzania generating significant revenues and foreign exchange from tourism.

"Climate change" remains a new terminology to most journalists and media professionals in Africa. This new terminology reflects the real situation in most media houses in Sub-Saharan Africa where governments lack resources and proper mechanisms to engage journalists in campaigning on impacts of climate change in respective countries. The exception is South Africa where considerable reporting has been done on the impacts of climate change.

Print media, which is still dominant and most influential compared to electronic media (internet, radio, television, blogs, etc.) in Africa, has so far played a leading role in educating and informing the public on effects of environmental deterioration and related human impacts. But little has been done on climate change.

Why African Media Fails to Campaign on Climate Change?

There are several reasons why the print media fails to take a leading role in campaigning for education of climate change in most African countries.

1. Lack of Climate-change Awareness: Most journalists and other media professionals are not well informed of climate-change impacts. Some fail to differentiate between climate change and environmental degradation. Several seminars, public campaigns, special trainings and in-house campaigns have been conducted on environmental degradation among media professionals, while less or little has been done to educate media professional in climate change and its impacts. Most news covered in newspapers and magazines are sourced from European and American media outlets, not African sources. Between 2005 and 2010, less than 200 news articles and features were covered in East African print media (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) reflecting directly the effects of climate change in the region (East Africa).

2. Poor Coordination between African Governments and the Media: African governments do little or nothing to engage the media on educative campaigns for public awareness on impacts of climate change in Africa. In Tanzania, as an example, climate-

change information and data are coordinated under the Vice President's Office through the Minister of State, responsible for environment. But, unfortunately, no information or news comes from the minister except briefings on conferences and other events. No scientific data and researched information is released to the media for use as a public awareness campaign. Most researched information on climate change remains as secret documents in government files.

3. Donor Participation: Compared to environmental degradation campaigns since the 1990 Rio Summit, in which donor countries sponsored the media houses and journalists to campaign for environmental protection, little is being done to support reporters to write news on impacts of climate change in respective African countries. Key donors in Tanzania and probably Africa – The European Union, USAID, SIDA, DFID, GTZ and NORAD have sponsored and organized a number of seminars, workshops and special trainings on environment protection for media houses, staff writers, individual journalists and correspondents. But nothing similar has been done for climate change.

4. Poor Resources in Media Houses: Journalists, correspondents and contributors are interested to cover areas that have been affected by climate change, but fail to carry out such assignments due to lack of resources, including working equipment – portable computers fitted with internet for quick communication, lack of funds to cover travel costs, etc. Compared with other countries in Europe, the Americas, South East Asia and the Pacific Islands, Africa is less developed on communication, while a big part of the continent is forested land or arid land where traveling from one corner of a country to another takes days or weeks. This situation adds more costs to travel.

Role Played by Print Media in Campaigning for Climate Change

Despite all hurdles facing journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa, there have been a remarkable number of articles and media releases on the impacts of climate change in Africa. In Tanzania, there have been a number of articles on climate-change impacts, but most of them are not on a regular basis as compared with sports and political news.

The effects of El Nino rains in 1998 reflected the most coverage in Tanzanian and East African newspapers. A number of articles were published in several newspapers including the Daily Nation (Kenya), The Standard (Kenya), Daily News (Tanzania), The Guardian (Tanzania), The East African (East Africa) and the popular Kiswahili newspapers, all reflecting the negative effects of the rains in most parts of the East African region.

The journalists did not relate the El Nino rains with climate change, but took the rains as part of common weather variations. People in East Africa did not have any idea that could warn them and the public that “El Nino rains were the effects of climate change.”

Roads leading to key wildlife parks in Tanzania, including Serengeti National Park, Ngorongoro Crater, Selous Game Reserve, Ruaha National Parks and several others were badly damaged, causing delays or itinerary cancellations from visitors booked to visit the areas.

Permanent droughts, the effects of El Nino rains and deaths in masses of wildlife in key tourist sites received little coverage, as journalists and other media professionals failed to tell their readers in detail about the effects of climate change in relation to the El Nino phenomena.

Natural disasters and malaria outbreaks in Northern Regions of Tanzania (Arusha and Kilimanjaro) were reported while tourist sites experienced higher temperatures as a result of climate change. In those areas, tourists were required to take anti-malaria pills, apply mosquito repellent and use mosquito nets on their beds. The print media had not adequately reported on these situations to sensitize the public and tourists to these conditions.

The impact of climate change in Africa is also seen with submerged islands because of a rise in the sea level, periodic flooding – and in other areas with decreasing water levels in lakes and rivers.

In Tanzania, for example, a tourist hotel on the Indian Ocean beaches in the capital city of Dar es Salaam – Hotel Africana, was totally submerged due to rising levels of the Indian Ocean waters. Kunduchi Beach Hotel – also on the Indian Ocean beaches of Dar es Salaam, is facing the threat submergence as the Indian Ocean waters rise. The media has had little or no reporting of either situation.

Climate change is likely to pose a significant threat to the tourism sector. Most hotels are located along the coastline and any increase in sea level will affect them severely. For example, the Kunduchi and Bahari Beach resort hotels in Dar-es-Salaam have been so substantially eroded that a huge investment has been made to restore them.

Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest mountain remains the only widely publicized tourist hot spot in East Africa. The mountain is the leading tourist attraction in Tanzania, accounting for 25,000 to 40,000 foreign and domestic tourists a year and sustaining the livelihood of four million people in Kenya and Tanzania through agricultural and business activities.

Global-warming effects are being felt in most parts of Africa with great impacts on tourist sites, including Tanzanian wildlife parks and the Mount Kilimanjaro ecosystem. Standing freely and majestically with its snow gleaming in the sun, Mount Kilimanjaro is in great danger of losing its eye-catching glaciers. The mountain is located some 330 kilometers and three degrees south of the equator. In recent decades, Kilimanjaro glaciers have progressively shrunk as climate-change effects caused the mountain snow to melt.

Fortunately, Mount Kilimanjaro is slowly regaining its snow after several years of drought in East Africa and the effects of climate change in the African continent. The snow is slowly mounting providing beautiful views of Kibo peak and new hope to Mount Kilimanjaro environmental watchdogs that the mountain may not lose its beautiful ice cap as scientists predicted.

Climate-change impacts on agriculture, common-pool resources such as forests and pastures and human health are the most threatening ones from the viewpoint of the majority of the people in Tanzania and which need frequent coverage in the media. The media must examine factors and impacts of climate change much more closely together with the potential vulnerabilities of affected human populations, wildlife and natural resources as discussed above and with much greater scrutiny of government officials and policies.

Challenges Ahead

Africa's bountiful natural resources and tourism assets are facing imminent threats due to climate changes. The media must mount a concerted public awareness campaign to broaden awareness on these issues.

East African Mountains of Ruwenzori and Elgon in Uganda with a section of other mountain ranges in the region are losing their ecological heritage at an alarming rate due to global warming, posing great dangers to the regional economies.

The impact of climate change in Africa is also seen with submerged islands because of a rise in the sea level, decreasing water levels in lakes and rivers and periodic occurrences of floods.

Tourism is a key sector of East Africa's economy and areas being affected by climate change, including wildlife parks, mountain-related heritage, lakes, rivers and coastal areas comprise 90% of East Africa's tourist resources.

The media – especially the print media – has a major role to play in sensitizing vulnerable communities, donor agencies and African governments so as to help in pulling resources that will help to reduce the effects of climate change in the African continent.