REPORT ON
NATIONAL CONVERSATION ON DIGITAL AGENDA &
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN TOURISM

Prepared by:
KONDWANI CHAMWALA
TEAM ADVENTURE MALAWI
Cell: +265 888 580 763; kochamwala@gmail.com; www.teamadventure.mw

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Team Adventure Malawi convened a National Conversation on the Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence in Tourism during its 9th Annual General Meeting held in Monkey Bay, Mangochi. The discussion aligned with the United Nations Global Tourism Theme 2026: "Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism."

The dialogue brought together government, private sector, technology experts, and sustainable tourism practitioners to reflect on how digitalisation and AI can transform Malawi's tourism sector, while ensuring sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural integrity.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE CONVERSATION

The national conversation aimed to:
- Assess the current state of digitalisation and AI use in Malawi's tourism sector.
- Identify opportunities where AI can support tourism marketing, planning, sustainability, and service delivery.
- Highlight challenges limiting AI adoption, particularly for small and medium tourism enterprises.
- Explore the link between AI, climate change, and sustainable tourism development.
- Discuss ethical, cultural, and policy considerations surrounding AI in tourism.

3. PRESENTATIONS AND PANEL DISCUSSION

3.1 Presentations

The two presentations by Ndalimba Kolowiko and Stephano Nguluwe from Team Adventure emphasised that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already transforming global tourism and presents a real opportunity for Malawi. While the country is rich in natural and cultural attractions, its tourism sector remains largely under-visible and under-utilised in the digital space.

Stephano Nguluwe

A major issue raised was Malawi's low digital presence on platforms where most travel decisions are now made. AI-driven tools such as targeted digital marketing, social media algorithms, and content recommendations offer affordable ways to reach international audiences, yet they are not widely used. Limited customer engagement was also highlighted, as many small and community-based operators struggle to respond to visitors across time zones. AI solutions like chatbots, automated bookings, and real-time translation can improve responsiveness and professionalism without increasing costs.
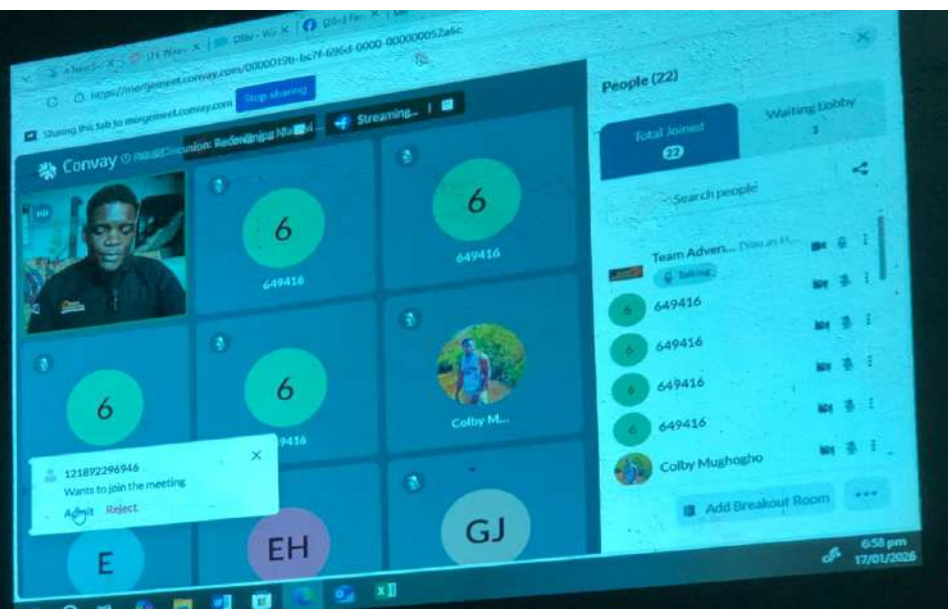

Ndalimba Kolowiko

The presenters further noted the lack of personalised tourism experiences due to limited use of data. This affects visitor satisfaction, repeat travel, and revenue. Operational challenges such as booking errors, payment fraud, and poor planning were also discussed, with AI offering solutions through secure payments, fraud detection, and demand forecasting.

Sustainability and conservation emerged as critical concerns. AI can support wildlife monitoring, visitor management, and energy efficiency, but these tools remain largely untapped. Ethical and inclusion risks were also raised, including data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential exclusion of rural operators, women, and small enterprises due to cost, connectivity, and skills gaps.

In conclusion, the presenters stressed that the real challenge is not adopting AI, but doing so responsibly, ensuring inclusive, ethical, and sustainable digital transformation aligned with Malawi's development priorities.

3.2 The Panel Discussion

3.2.1 Composition of the Panel

The discussion was moderated by Eric Msikiti and featured the following panelists:
• Gift Mwale: Senior Tourism Officer, Department of Tourism, Malawi
• Gehazi Jenda: Acting CEO, iMoSyS (Technology and AI Solutions)
• Hilda Limbani: Sustainable Tourism Development Specialist
• Jonnie Mwanabvuli Kabwiro: Managing Director, Misuku Expeditions

4. KEY ISSUES AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Digitalisation as a Foundation for AI

A central theme throughout the discussion was that AI cannot function effectively without digitalisation. Panelists agreed that Malawi's tourism sector is still at an early stage of digital maturity. Many tourism businesses, particularly small operators, lack:
• Functional websites and email systems
• Consistent online presence
• Digitised tourism products and services

Without sufficient digital footprints, data generation remains limited, restricting AI's effectiveness.

4.2 Underutilisation of AI in Tourism

The panel noted that AI in Malawi's tourism sector is largely underutilised. While some digital initiatives exist, AI applications remain minimal and fragmented. Current usage is mostly limited to:
• Basic online marketing
• Social media content creation

Advanced applications such as predictive analytics, personalised recommendations, itineraries, and environmental monitoring are still rare.

Panellists
Gehazi
Hilda
Jonnie
Gift

4.3 Content Creation and Digital Marketing

AI-powered content creation emerged as a major opportunity for Malawi's tourism marketing. Panelists highlighted that:
• Social media usage in Malawi has grown rapidly in recent years.
• AI-supported content creation offers cost-effective marketing compared to traditional advertising.
• Content creation itself has become a new employment avenue for youth.

Digital storytelling, when combined with Malawi's cultural richness, was identified as a powerful tool for destination branding.

4.4 Data Availability and Big Data Challenges

AI relies heavily on big data, yet Malawi faces a significant data gap. The Department of Tourism shared experiences from developing Mulondola, an AI-based tool designed to analyse tourist reviews and feedback. Challenges identified included:
• Limited online reviews from domestic tourists
• Inadequate digital visibility of tourism products
• Incomplete or inconsistent data from operators

The panel stressed that without widespread data generation, AI tools cannot reach their full potential.

REDESIGNING MALAWI TOURISM WITH DIGITAL AGENDA AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve   MAGLA   ❋ Convay

4.5 Role of Government and Policy Gaps

Government representatives acknowledged that while digitalisation is referenced in existing tourism policies, AI-specific frameworks are largely absent. Key issues raised included:

- Lack of AI-focused tourism policies
- Absence of ethical and regulatory frameworks for AI use
- Need for policy reforms to mainstream AI in tourism planning

The discussion emphasized government's role in policy leadership, regulation, infrastructure development, and skills training.

4.6 AI, Climate Change, and Sustainable Tourism

The panel explored the relationship between AI and sustainable tourism development, particularly in the context of climate change. Key points included:

- AI can support environmental monitoring, wildlife tracking, and ecosystem protection.
- Predictive analytics can help tourism operators plan activities around weather patterns and climate risks.
- AI can aid sustainable destination management by reducing human-wildlife conflict and improving conservation planning.

Sustainable tourism was defined as tourism that protects cultural, environmental, and natural assets for present and future generations.

4.7 Human Touch vs Artificial Intelligence

Concerns were raised about AI potentially replacing human jobs, particularly tour guides. The panel strongly agreed that:

- AI should support, not replace, human roles.
- Skills such as storytelling, emotional connection, and cultural interpretation remain uniquely human.
- Tour guides should be empowered through training to complement AI tools rather than compete with them.

4.8 Small vs Large Tourism Operators

The discussion highlighted disparities between large and small tourism enterprises in adopting AI. While larger operators have more resources, panelists noted that:

- AI can actually level the playing field by offering affordable analytics and marketing tools.
- Collaboration between large and small operators is more beneficial than competition.
- Unified digital platforms could improve market access for small operators.

4.9 Ethical, Cultural, and Accuracy Concerns

Questions were raised regarding who audits AI outputs for cultural sensitivity and ethical accuracy. Key observations included:

- Malawi currently lacks clear legal and ethical frameworks governing AI.
- Institutions such as MACRA may address data protection and misinformation issues, but AI-specific oversight remains limited.
- Cultural misrepresentation through generative AI poses risks if not properly managed.

The panel called for the development of national ethical guidelines for AI use in tourism.

4.10 Skills Development and Capacity Building

There was strong consensus on the need for digital literacy and AI skills training. Ongoing and planned initiatives include:

- Vocational and professional training under TEVETA

- Support from development partners
- Targeted training for youth, small businesses, and informal tourism promoters
- Capacity building was identified as critical for inclusive AI adoption.

5. PRIVATE SECTOR PERSPECTIVES

From an operator's perspective, Misuku Expeditions shared practical applications of AI, including:
- Data-driven market analysis for different source markets
- Personalised travel planning and itinerary design
- Use of AI in demand forecasting and product development

The private sector emphasized the importance of first mastering basic internet use before advancing to AI adoption.

6. KEY TAKEAWAYS
- Digitalisation is a prerequisite for effective AI adoption in tourism.
- Malawi's tourism sector is at an early stage of AI utilisation, with significant growth potential.
- Data availability remains one of the biggest barriers to AI effectiveness.
- AI presents opportunities for marketing, sustainability, planning, and job creation.
- Human skills, culture, and storytelling remain central to tourism despite AI advancements.
- Strong collaboration among government, private sector, academia, and communities is essential.

7. THEME WAY FORWARD
Team Adventure is committed to scaling up the national conversation to raise awareness of the 2026 Global Tourism Theme on the Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence through the following actions:
- Expanding the national conversation by engaging a wider range of tourism stakeholders at higher decision-making and policy levels.
- Partnering with influencers and digital creators to amplify the conversation and reach broader audiences, particularly young people.
- Taking the conversation to academic institutions to inspire learning, research, and innovation around AI and digitalisation in tourism.
- Encouraging tourism players to embrace the theme and integrate it into their discussions, strategies, and digital platforms throughout the year.
- Engaging tour guides and local tourism operators to ensure grassroots participation and practical adoption of the digital agenda.

8. CONCLUSION

The National Conversation marked an important starting point in Malawi's engagement with the global digital and AI tourism agenda. While challenges remain, the dialogue highlighted clear pathways for action, including digitalisation, policy reform, skills development, and ethical governance.
The discussion concluded with a call for sustained engagement, collaboration, and investment to ensure that artificial intelligence becomes a tool for inclusive, sustainable, and competitive tourism development in Malawi.